Whoso Breaketh an Hedge

"Iota"

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"WHOSO BREAKETH AN HEDGE"

By the same Author.

A YELLOW ASTER.
A COMEDY IN SPASMS.
A QUAKER GRANDMOTHER.
PATRICIA.
ANNE MAULEVERER.
POOR MAX.
SMOKE IN THE FLAME.
HE FOR GOD ONLY.
&c., &c., &c., &c.

"Whoso Breaketh an Hedge"

BY

MRS. MANNINGTON CAFFYN

("IOTA")

"Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him."

(*Ecclesiastes*)

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"WHOSO BREAKETH AN HEDGE"

CHAPTER I

AUDREY VANSITTART was always light-hearted and generally reckless, but her taste, except when too severe a strain was put on it, was good. She knew how to dress. She could spend half an hour and an incredible amount of mental activity in putting on her hat, then forget all about it and wear it with the radiant unselfconsciousness of a flower. Unlike some women, she had more faith in herself in the end than in her hat.

A certain ordered gravity running cool and undisturbed through their torrential stream of change characterized the least of her little ways. It was this suggestion of a likeness to things with which he was in the habit of dealing, things which posit unity in variety and the converse, that first fixed the near-sighted eyes of Andrew Antrobus upon Miss Vansittart.

He linked her in a perplexing yet magically enchanting way with mathematics—Audrey Vansittart and mathematics! Rather perhaps with the dimly-apprehended, long-lost heaven which lies, whether he confess it or not, or howsoever prosaic to the vulgar eye he may appear, deep down behind the mind of every true lover of the sacred science of numbers. It was the enduring gravity of the great lady in the laughter-loving evanescence of the child, the rhythmic order of the ages in the sheerest inconsequence of the hour which, as presented to his simple mind by

Audrey, so powerfully reacted upon Andrew. Poor Andrew Antrobus! this puzzled intruder into a world of slang and incoherent antics, and of women who never suggested, at least to a humble person unused to them, anything at all of a cosmic nature, who had, so to speak, no "sign," who filled one with a general sense of dislocation, and brought on, very frequently, a nervous headache.

Even in the earliest stages, when he only beheld her well-dressed person quite unaware of his presence, the centre of a senseless chattering crowd in which the delicate richness of her voice always took the lead, she was to Andrew as a sacred hush in a godless babel, in the midst of clotted discord a most simple harmony.

So much for mathematics when befooled by love!

He made no pretence either then or afterwards of understanding this paradox in a Paris frock or of trying to explain or justify its existence to his big mind, so full in other regards of inexorable logical demand. All he knew was that it troubled his heart, and whilst bemusing his intelligence, yet transformed his outlook in the most odd and distracting way, and that this confusion of incomprehensible emotions conferred a wild new glory upon life.

For the first time in his twenty-seven years he was taken, at the mere sight of another human being of inferior brain power, with a rapturous shortness of breath, a delirious upheaval of accepted prejudices, a dizzying sense of supreme gladness, an inconceivable apprehension of suffering entirely unconnected with any state of mental excitement he knew anything about, and in the same moment was aware that this tangle of pleasing pain was just part of the heritage of youth, that mystery he had so often desired to solve. But there had always been so much hard work to be done, that he had never been able to find time for the easy. All that had been for the more fortunate. He had stood outside it, a humble worker, his soul set in the direction of the things which man may free from time.

He had been reared in an atmosphere of earnest endeavour, purely feminine; the far-reaching shadow of undeveloped imagination and overdeveloped conscience had always darkened his steps and kept the light from his path. For no one but he who has sat under it will credit the way in which a really serious-minded woman can project the shadow of her petticoats or how it impoverishes the soil.

From his very birth Andrew had been the engrossing responsibility of three sisters, none less than five feet ten in height, and with not a spare inch of flesh between them. They had squandered their youth and spoilt their figures and shattered their organs, never quite sound, and all in the service of Andrew. The Miss Antrobuses came of a fine and exclusive old stock, and had been reared hard and fast in its traditions. They had the lowest possible opinion of the modern woman, and of the methods of an education which can turn her out helmeted and full-panoplied, panting to close with any unseemly dragon that may come along.

To be grounded at home by governesses and finished in Town by masters was all that their kith and kin had ever desired for their daughters, or could have thought themselves justified in desiring. Thus it was no vain-glory or vaulting ambition that drove Katharine Antrobus, the spring that moved the family, into the Higher Education for women; still less had it to do with the yearnings of the modern for action, her fine intellectual pride in acquiring, her honest glory in achieving. Very far from it. Any toil not directly concerned with Society, the Church, or the Poor, Katharine felt to be a subtle degradation, a sort of unexplored uncleanness, a nameless insult to those who had gone before; above all, a levelling down of the upper classes, of quite national importance. When Katharine, with her two sisters in tow, went forth on the search for knowledge and the right to set up cabalistic signs behind their ancient and unsullied names with the ignoble aim of ultimately running a select ladies' school,

they felt as three dethroned princesses might have done on first taking to the road.

To keep school for young people, some of whom, from the lamentable state of society, must of necessity be her gross inferiors, was a humiliation that could never be forgotten by Katharine. It paled, however, before the recurring horror of having to send in her well-earned bills to their parents.

To the very last she never watched her tail of well-dressed, well-set-up girls going off to a hockey match but she felt a chill down her back and thought of her grandmother. The ambition of the sisters soared far above either attending schools or keeping them. Anything approaching the "wild joy of living" had indeed never entered into their hearts to conceive. It would have reminded them of ill-gotten wealth and the "smart set," but they could have discerned happiness, full and abiding, in a cottage and one small governess-cart in a really good neighbourhood.

All that the Miss Antrobuses relinquished, and all that they achieved, was entirely for the sake of the baby Andrew bequeathed to them, in addition to the cottage and the governess-cart, a small income, and a large press full of rejected manuscript, by an amiable dreamer. In striving to realize his dreams, he had gone through three fortunes, then died of sorrow just one week after his wife. She, for her part, having fulfilled his last demand and borne him a son to carry on the traditions of a distinguished name, in wondering what on earth was to become of her baby, had inadvertently slipped out of life. It was the one selfish act of a lifetime, and laid a burthen all too heavy upon shoulders too young to carry it gaily.

Gilbert Antrobus's last dream, as his first, brought forth nothing but sordid anxiety and extremely hard work for those he had spent his life in declaring altogether too sacred and transcendental for debasing contact with either. His most trenchant utterances on the subject were contained in a poem he wrote beside his wife's grave

on the eve of his own decease. Although it was the worn fingers of a once beautiful hand that inspired his last lay, no one could accuse Gilbert Antrobus of not having been unswervingly faithful to his Ideal!

It is not to be wondered at, however, that from their earliest days his daughters took very serious views of what to their unilluminated vision appeared to be the Real.

The eldest was only seventeen when she found herself fetched up short before it, with two younger sisters and a baby tugging at her short skirts. With no comment, but with a smart click of steel, she shut up the Ideal with the rejected verses and went hammer and tongs for the Real.

If the family had produced one dreamer, it had produced many men of action and scholars not a few, and if an aristocratic leisure had been the privilege of the Antrobus women, they had never been idlers.

There was nothing mean in the material which Katharine designed to mould. So she put her father away in a little nebulous niche all to himself, shut her lips so tight that they never got loose again, and took possession of her family.

If they sold the cottage and the governess-cart, compounded their income and lived in rooms near a great woman's college, there would be enough to give them the education necessary for the profession of teaching, and to keep Andrew.

Having arranged everything with her father's kind old lawyer, with prim and polite but inexorable decision, Katharine made known to her only near kindred—the Anstruther-Antrobuses, who were violently disapproving of all her proceedings, that she, as guardian of the infant Andrew, represented the elder branch of the Antrobuses, which from immemorial ages had always acted as seemed best without reference to any junior. The letter, considering the composer's age, was monumental. It staggered the younger branch, and as Gilbert, Heaven knew, had given

them trouble enough and his daughters had not even the good looks of the family, they washed their hands of the whole concern.

The girls worked with relentless earnestness, and with the same grim determination they adored the baby.

The gift of laughter is often hereditary, and it rarely goes with rejected manuscript. It did not often strike them to smile, they had a thousand other things to do; an insurmountable maidenliness in all three made them too shy for caresses, and it can safely be presumed that, in the whole course of his well-cared-for infancy, Andrew never listened to one light or purposeless word.

During her progress B.A.-wards it is only the exceptional woman who can relax sufficiently to suit the pappy mind of a baby not her own.

The very year their scanty funds gave out, an excellent opportunity presented itself, and they started school. The youngest was then just sixteen. It was a day school, however, so they could all go on with their own education and begin Andrew's. This they did in the best and most generous way, but there was very little left for food. Besides, the ladies did not care for food; they were immersed in higher matters. The food was often very forbidding, and Andrew had a fastidious appetite. Whity-brown stewed steak got mixed in very early with his conception of great and good women.

Andrew could very well have taken scholarships, and would have rejoiced in the chance of helping himself, but his sisters did not approve of scholarships for Andrew. There are certain women who must always be doing their duty to the bitter end, no matter who may suffer. It had never been necessary for the Antrobus boys to take scholarships, and Andrew certainly should not be the first to begin. Andrew, for his part, always did as he was told.

When he was ten years of age his sisters sent him to the most exclusive and expensive preparatory school they could find. After that, for only four months in the year, did he ever know comparative emptiness, but he used to

wonder with dumb depression if his sisters ever knew anything else. But they sent him to Eton, and then after a distinguished school record, followed by a more distinguished 'Varsity one, he came home at last to look out for some career suitable to his genius and name.

The blood of the dreamer had always interfered somewhat with the practical exploitation of Andrew, and looking for work under the auspices of his sisters, although a unique, was a soul-searching experience. He was going through it with much fortitude when a great-uncle died and he became a rich man.

The yoke of the women, in spite of their goodness, had lain heavy upon Andrew's young life, but now at last his own man, without a moment's hesitation he took Katharine by storm, the law into his own hands. With not so much as a glimmer of business instinct he insisted upon the school, now a flourishing one, being made over with no premium worth mentioning to the French mistress, an astute person who knew Andrew, and transferring its principals to his lovely Surrey home.

It was a fine rambling irregular old block of grey stone, deep-toned mellow brick, and rich red-tiled roofs, built haphazard. It told stories of many a period. An Antrobus in the Tudor times had brought home with him from his travels queer foreign notions, which time had naturalized. A good Jacobean had restored the west wing. The Georges had happily passed it by, and the other periods were now all friends together in their common vesture of flower-starred green. There was a little decorous Dutch garden under the very shadow of a stately Italian parterre, and a riot of English roses everywhere overflowed all bounds. The park was as unpremeditated and as irregular as the house. Rich zones of pasture land were plumped, apparently of their own choosing, into wild reaches of heather and pine, and they all stretched out to a wood of chestnuts and birch and great old oaks on one side, and on the other to a half moon of low hills, heather and thyme scented, steeped all through the summer in a deep haze of blue.

Andrew made the whole place over to his sisters and begged them to rest and take their ease. The radiant, renewing joy of Andrew in being able at last to turn the tables, and to be the giver and the protector, touched inarticulate unknown depths in his worn sisters. Their very pride put an obligation upon them. Their indefatigable consciences were involved.

They made superhuman efforts to do as Andrew entreated. In trying to rest they worked harder than ever they had done in their lives. They worked themselves to the bone. School-keeping was in comparison a light and frivolous amusement. In order to relieve the painful tension, Katharine scolded the servants and made Andrew very uncomfortable in his fine house, but all in vain. The poison of unloved duty and " going without " had soaked into the marrow of their bones, and no human effort could eject it.

They said nothing, of course. These things remain mute in the women who experience them. But Andrew knew. He had seen too much of the lives of old-fashioned, anxious women not to have had the hideous details of household economy branded into him. It was not the frequent change of cooks, and the varying quality in the *menus* that distressed him, but he was pursued by a wearing conviction that when he was absent they ate up the scraps and drank cooking sherry. Of one sort of woman Andrew knew too much !

His path was indeed a prickly one, for now that he was the prosperous member of the family his two elder sisters tyrannized over him after a fashion their generosity would have made impossible had he still been dependent upon them.

He took no notice of their petty bullying, and begged them to eat proper food. He went so far as to confiscate all but the best brands of wine the cellar contained.

They had so few active interests in life, his poor sisters, and he so many ! Besides, now that they had a little time in which to think of themselves and felt justified—

the future of Andrew being happily assured—in numbering doctors' bills amongst their legitimate expenses, it was found that Adeline, the youngest sister, was suffering from a mortal disease, and that the two others consisted chiefly of nerves in a state of anarchy.

Sophia, when not engaged in helping Katharine to bully Andrew, was pathetically anxious to do as he desired. So she gave up her classical studies and took to reading modern novels chosen for her at random by Andrew, and one day, as she lay on her back patiently trying to master the contents of one, some little vital cord snapped within her, and she died. The doctor gave the disease a fine Latin name, but his wife, who also had studied medicine, read the book and pronounced that to have been the cause of death. A woman's wits can generally get to the root of the matter.

The fact that his prosperity brought so little relief to his faithful guardians profoundly grieved Andrew, but he had established a laboratory upon his ground-floor, and a man cannot be altogether unhappy when he is looking for the soul of things in slime and the romance of all the worlds in radium. Besides, he now rioted magnificently in meetings of learned *confrères* delighted to welcome to their ranks a wholly devoted enthusiast of ample means. It is so often paupers who are all too passionately ready to offer themselves up on the altars of science, and paupers need financing, and science is poor. Andrew now frequently dined in London. Sometimes he slept there. Occasionally driven to it by relatives, he sat out dances with bewildering young ladies who did all the talking. For the rich branch having inspected his premises took forcible possession of him, and Andrew, having been trained to obedience and hating strife, meekly gave in.

They put him up for the right clubs, compelled him to know the right people, and insisted upon his learning bridge of sorts. They even made him go out now and again with a golf outfit, which, unless well watched, he generally dropped by the way.

It was under the auspices of the Anstruther-Antrobuses he first met Audrey Vansittart.

Audrey was penniless. The aunt whose heiress she was supposed to be, and who had given her her atrociously bad bringing up, had just died, leaving nothing behind her but debts and a solemn injunction upon her niece to get settled without delay lest worse befall. There were stories, it seemed, in regard to Audrey. Even at eighteen she gave great promise.

Her aunt had always looked upon life as a huge and somewhat malignant joke, and had for many years lived sumptuously upon an annuity, so that Audrey had always enjoyed every luxury. Thus her position was now a critical one. For one unused to corners she found herself in a very tight corner indeed.

CHAPTER II

HER mother and her grandmother before her had also given much early promise, a promise not entirely belied by later events ; but in their case the thing had been done in the best way, a way utterly impossible to a pauper. They had been triumphant over all their enemies, and had each died still beautiful and in the odour of the sanctity then most in vogue.

They had given but little real anxiety to their family. It was another story with Audrey, however. A pauper with proclivities is a danger to society. It was, therefore, greatly to the credit of Lady Treherne, her mother's cousin, that she put her own feelings entirely aside, and offered to give Audrey her first chance. For, in spite of the adventures attributed to Audrey, she had only just been stripped for the start when her aunt died.

Lady Treherne put the case quite frankly before the girl. She would give her a clear three months' show in a perfect environment for success, all appointments lavishly provided ; but the matter must be decided for good or for ill within the specified limit of time ; not a day beyond it would she allow.

Her son, the heir to important estates, would be coming home in the autumn, and if she had not certain other of the boasted advantages of her family, she had, at any rate, the one conscience among them, and sooner than bring Percival into direct contact with a Vansittart on her last stand she would pray that a tiger might devour him.

Lady Treherne liked a metaphor with some probability about it, and Percival shot big game.

It was a sporting offer. Audrey promptly accepted it, and all might have gone well had she not already met Larry Carfax.

She had begun practically at seventeen, and had had several affairs within the year; but she loved Larry with something that came as near to passion at its flood as is possible to eighteen.

If she married him now, as she had, of course, intended to do had her aunt left her the fortune for which they were both waiting, he would have to leave his regiment at once. Larry couldn't spell, so no one in his senses would have him for a secretary. It would mean the Poor-house, therefore, or some indistinct colony for the present, and for the future, too, so far as human foresight could pierce, for Larry's uncle, a person calculated to live for ever, would undoubtedly disinherit him. Even with a fortune, a Vansittart promised to be a serious difficulty to the old man.

Larry was only too ardently ready to face any vague ruin for Audrey's sake. He was young and simple and irresponsible, and he loved her dearly, although young. Audrey was neither simple nor irresponsible, and she had no vocation for being a pauper, still less had she any for making one of Larry.

Besides being quite as selfish, Audrey was much more keenly personal to herself than are most very young girls; but from her very babyhood she had always hated being a spoke in anyone's wheel, and to be one in Larry's was peculiarly odious to her. The more she thought of it the less she liked it. At the same time, the more she loved Larry. But anything may happen in three months, and Larry was safe at Gibraltar. She would have a free hand, and could act as though he were non-existent, and find out about all sorts of things. Perhaps Larry might be duplicated after all; who could tell? So buoyed up by faith, hope and charity, she took her trials superbly.

Virtue, for once in its life, was being its own reward in an entirely satisfactory way.

The very thought of her disinterested kindness to an undesirable orphan often sent thrills through the happy chaperon. She did her best to look like a benediction in general society.

Before the first month was out there were two unexceptionable openings for Audrey on offer. The second month was in its last days, however, and Audrey still hesitated. The time was short, decisive action imperative.

By this time Andrew Antrobus had become more or less articulate, and made the third opportunity.

Lady Treherne recalled the terms of the compact to Audrey, and gave her three days in which to decide. The thing must be done thoroughly, irrevocably, and with distinction before Percival came home. The men were willing. All that now remained to be done was to send out the wedding-cards and arrange about the trousseau. Audrey's own higher self must tell her that even in *her* exceptional case things must not bear the impress of too indelicate a haste. As all the world knew, she impressively remarked, she could explain a great deal, but she must have a full month in which to do it.

To give Lady Treherne her due, she knew nothing of Larry, he was altogether Audrey's own affair, and she had made the most searching investigations into the prospects of those she had submitted to the girl's inspection. She did her part nobly, and had always given Audrey credit for an unusual amount of prompt common-sense, and a marked absence of sentiment.

It would have surprised her immensely to see how drearily sentimental the soundest common-sense may become upon a moonlit night in Mayfair.

It did not even strike Audrey to consult anyone upon this momentous occasion. She had not a friend in the world who could make the best of a bad bargain, any better than herself, and Larry was for her to dispose of, and not for other people. She kept on hoping until the very last

moment. For two whole days she waited for something to happen, for the gods to give some sign.

But the heavens were as brass. The gods were silent. She went to her room whistling the last new tune, and finished it before she began to think.

Lady Treherne, listening in her own room, felt relieved, and yet she was sorry the girl should be so heartless. How different it was from the never-to-be-forgotten day upon which she had accepted dear Robert, now, thank God, in Heaven. Oblivious of her pious paradox, she took up Goulburn's sermons and composed her thoughts for the night.

When she had finished her tune, Audrey sat down by her window, and thought of Larry with her whole strength. He came so near to her that night, so immeasurably dear. She seemed suddenly able to look at him, and through him, and all round him; there was nothing about Larry she did not know, and no argument on earth could ever make either of them fit for even comparative starvation. So she simply ruled out Larry, and decided not to tell him anything until all was over. Then she steadied herself to think the rest out, but instead of thinking she began to cry, the dreadful slow tears of the first great sorrow, which seemed to be forced out one by one. They were so laborious and hard; they hurt her as though they were atoms of sand. She might have been a woman grown, who through experience has learnt to compare, so strongly and maturely did she suffer. And, also, she might have been the most treacle-hearted miss in London, so demoralized with misery did she become. Every ridiculous foolishness she had been warned against all her life came flooding in upon Audrey, and a thousand others of which she had never so much as heard. She was soaked in the folly of the ages, dissolved in their weakness.

And then the clock struck midnight, and she remembered that the time was short. If her aunt had taught her nothing else, she had taught her the imbecility of

giving way to feelings in the moment for action. So she pulled herself up, and did her hair, and put on her dressing-gown, and with the throbbing life of London beating in upon her, dry-eyed and keen-witted, she stood up to the inevitable.

An aptitude for affairs had from the first been one of the gifts of Audrey, and her outlook upon the proposed deal in her person was of the most primitive order; her reflections were thus very much to the point.

Time now meant everything. Retreat was blocked. She must go on somehow. Larry, as well as Percival, would be back in a month, and if she saw him for one five minutes she would undoubtedly marry him and upset everybody's apple-cart. The ancient alternatives were clearly not for her. She could neither dig nor beg. Besides, she had not a rood of ground to dig in, nor a friend in the world to beg from. As for starving, she had too good an appetite to conceive of it. And one can't stand still. One can never stand still; one must go on—on—on—somehow.

Neither the past nor the present was of the smallest assistance to her. There was nothing available now but the future. And marriage was the only stepping-stone to that, and one must secure something! The rest was a blurred agony, a foolish mist of tears.

One must settle first about the men, the only possible means to any end, the indispensable agents in any forward movement, and too urgent now to be any longer warded off.

The first two she found, upon close and detailed consideration, too difficult altogether. The little likenesses to Larry that ran in and out of their unlikenesses made her faint and sick in the cool air of night.

They had, it is true, all the things she wanted. Even then she felt stirrings in her of immense necessities, things which would call for worlds of space for their platform; the cry for life, free and limitless, was in her ears. But the men!

They would be wanting so much, those two : be demanding as a right everything she would have showered on Larry as a matter of course. She was swept and swamped in some great wave of mutiny. Her whole being rose in revolt against some unknown bondage, a dreadful sense of helplessness in strong, compelling hands took hold of her and shook and shattered her.

To be bound or coerced, or perhaps even bullied, into doing his will and not your own by one inevitable man—it was an inconceivable sort of insult! Her breath came in short dry sobs, her heart beat wildly, her eyeballs were on fire ; she felt so outraged and lonely, and the night was so pitiless. It told her things hard to brook, awful to deal with. It took her courage away.

The new current of agitation brought a sudden flush into her stream of thought, and all at once, by no diversion of her making, it was driven at full flood towards Andrew. Poor old, surprised Mr. Antrobus, who thought her an angel!

He hadn't half the things the others had, but he would never encroach, or try to bend her to his horrible will, or keep her fussing round after him. He would just worship her afar off and leave her alone. He was of such small account, Andrew! He hardly counted at all, and he was so kind. He could take care of her and admire her, and be always absorbed in his own affairs.

And, after all, what did the usual things matter now when she had come to the end of everything? Nothing mattered any more, least of all Andrew or herself. He would clothe her, and house her, and feed her, and he was less like Larry than any human being she had ever met. Besides, she could give him the little he would want without injuring Larry at all really.

Her decision clinched, Audrey sobbed herself to sleep.

The next day, in a gentle, docile way that went to his heart, she accepted Andrew, and in the same spirit of meekness a few weeks later she married him.

Her prophetic instinct did not play her false. Andrew

counted hardly at all in the honeymoon, but so many other things did count, that she found it a most wearing period. Larry's letters of reasonless reproach, after all she had done for him, were a little too much. They kept her alive, however; otherwise, she might have yawned herself to death.

Audrey had never been properly bored before in all her life, and she did not know quite what to make of it. No one could have behaved more sweetly, however; she entirely satisfied Andrew.

When he knew definitely of the heaven that lay before him, in the most gentle and considerate way Andrew had established his sisters in a beautiful old house on the edge of the valley, but he could not forbid Katharine his house. She now bored Audrey even more than the honeymoon had done. Adeline touched her a little, and made her feel uncomfortable in a queer way. She rather resented the influence of Adeline. There was a sort of covert impertinence in it.

Both women had taught girls in order to live, and remembered all their worst points.

Still, Audrey kept her temper, considering the size and quality of her conscience, in rather a remarkable way. They were so old and dull, Andrew's sisters! She had a half-tender contempt for them; as active enemies they did not seem worth while.

She managed Andrew's house with an amount of dainty capacity that made Katharine detest her even more than she had felt sure would be the case. She was charming to Andrew's quiet country neighbours. She found them hopeless, not even worth shocking. Perhaps the consciousness that she could have shocked them after a fashion which must have permanently transformed their whole outlook upon life, kept her steady. It is the power of which we are least sure that we are always most anxious to exploit.

She did her duties very prettily, and night and day she longed for Larry.

For lack of her elevating influence Larry now was fast going to the devil. And one day a legacy amounting to eight hundred pounds a year fell, as it were from the blue, upon Audrey; no great fortune, but just enough to have made it possible, had they married, for Larry to remain in his regiment. Moreover, the uncle had lately become a teetotaler and a vegetarian, and being wholly unfit for reformation so radical, there were solid grounds for hope.

Audrey was immensely sorry for herself. If only she had waited, been a milliner, or swept a crossing, or gone into a tea shop, or anything, just for a little year or two! And those big forces that would have lain dormant perhaps in an active existence, in the dead level of dullness, and the sleepy air, began to swell in Audrey in the most alarming way. Big smouldering fires of passion were bursting into flame in her.

Sometimes destructive forces, which she had never felt before, would shake her as though she were a rat. She had never been particularly vindictive, she was too full of sunny good humour; but now she was always wanting to be avenged upon something. Everything became so intolerable that she was driven even into thinking of her health.

Never in all her life until she met Andrew had she had the ghost of a headache; now the very sight of him gave her a desperate one. Her condition must be rather serious! She would be getting cancer next, like Adeline! Ah! but she had lost more by her miserable haste than she had ever suspected. To be ready to take possession of the whole world, and to be dumped down in Surrey!

Each in his turn is given some desert in which to find or lose himself, and Audrey was rather young for deserts, and the best way in which to apply them. She cried a great deal. There was a pathos in her laughter that wrung the heart of Andrew. He wondered if she were growing pale, but did not venture to inquire. She was so sacred and so remote a trust!

All this, however, was nearly three years ago. Audrey had given up crying. She was no longer pale, but with a strange little smile on her grave child's mouth, with orderly deliberation she was dividing the beautiful jewels Andrew had given her from her own worthless trinkets, getting ready to run away from Andrew with Larry.

CHAPTER III

THE undeveloped intelligence of Audrey, full of surprises which so grievously affronted his sisters, Andrew found entrancing. He had suffered many things from the developed intelligences of women, and his sisters had never surprised him. Their mental data had always gone by clockwork; he could always calculate down to the decimal of a fraction what next to expect from them.

To watch the unfolding of a wonder such as Audrey became to Andrew a secret, sacred, and most absorbing method of research, a rest, and a refreshment. He watched her as a gardener, tired of delving in the wormy earth, might watch the unfolding of a new experiment in roses. On his return from a scientific meeting in which a Personal God, as became a concourse of blameless and God-fearing savants, had been politely, apologetically, but firmly excluded from the scheme of creation, she restored in him all the old warm human beliefs. No God, save only the gentle God of the Christian, could have made Audrey! She was, to her husband, the one right note in the striving discord, the finger-post to all truth. She was his hope and his salvation, a halo of ineffable romance about his shaggy head, a light to his searching feet!

Science, however, is engrossing. Andrew had little time for dallying in the magical atmosphere of feminine surprises. Audrey had to do a great deal of her un-

folding alone, in an atmosphere altogether alien to her. There were girls in her neighbourhood, of course, and she could have played games with them, but a game depends so much upon whom you play it with. Games were too full of memories of Larry for Audrey—they made the girls appear colourless. She had no children. She did not want any. It did not strike her that a child of Andrew's could be very interesting. It would be always reminding her of a test-tube. It did not occur to her, as it might to a better brought-up girl, that with a mind to improve and a gift for music, she need never be idle.

In the dearth of all rational amusement she began to loaf.

It was at this period that Katharine, having evolved subtle instincts from the contemplation of Audrey, coupled with sundry inrushing memories of her hideous slavery to the like of her, began fairly to prowl about the house, and that Andrew's absences in Germany became more frequent.

Audrey liked peace, and in her elfish way she was rather sorry for Katharine—her back was so long and unyielding, it must ache horribly; so she gave Katharine the run of the house, and went out into the garden. Katharine followed her; she seemed to be pursued by an all-seeing, all-comprehending B.A. It spoilt the flowers. Besides, when flowers are your only friends, they get to know too much, and they are so bewilderingly innocent that in the end you are afraid of them.

And now Larry's uncle died after an immense meal of vegetables. So Larry got all his money and estate. Andrew was still away, Katharine still in hot pursuit. Audrey craved for solitude and a fitting atmosphere in which to indulge her grief, so in sheer desperation she started a motor-car and frequently fled to London.

Although undeveloped in her higher parts, Audrey had instincts. She knew where danger lay, and sedulously avoided it. Her meeting with Larry was pure accident. When she met him, however, Larry was in need—in

direst, most urgent need—of reform. And the spirit of the reformer shot up like a consuming flame in Audrey.

It burnt up shrewd common sense, the gallery of highly-coloured illustrations of current life bequeathed her as sole dowry by her aunt, her own practical experience.

She only remembered the need of Larry, and her power to help. Larry gave readily to treatment, but suffered several bad relapses. His prosperity but reminded him of his pain, and he was doing his best to rid himself of the reminding burthen. The growing exigencies of the case brought him into ever-increasing contact with Audrey.

In her character of reforming angel she was irresistible, and Larry's resistance to any temptation, never of a very high order, had become atrophied by disuse.

They were two unawakened young animals, trained in a bad school, mad and miserable, and one day they fell.

Even this only partially woke up Audrey. She was still dazed with love. The horror of loneliness had slipped from her heart. For the rest, one could hardly count Andrew, and the others would be overjoyed to get rid of her on any terms. No one wanted her but Larry, or could be hurt by her, and Larry would take care of her.

There was a certain audacious sense of honour deep down in the grain of both boy and girl. The folly once committed, they would let no one suffer but themselves. They would stand together hand-in-hand and face the music.

They were sorry, too—after a little, when they had time to consider. Once, as they looked at each other in silence—for, with sin comes the fear of words—they saw in each other's eyes something so sad with the eternal sadness of the ages that their hands fell apart, their eyes shut out the vision, and a shame unfathomable and unspeakable took hold of Audrey. It was not any shame of Larry, or Andrew; still less of Andrew's sisters, or of

the world. Audrey had courage and experience, and she was very shrewd. She knew perfectly well that after the storm would come the calm.

Larry was very rich and his name was an historic one, and these things go a long way. She had no doubt at all that in time they would gain, at any rate, partial immunity from their madness. Besides, together, and with everything anyone could want, she must be always happy, and what do a few little years of being cut by frumps matter, after all, when you have all the rest? Larry had the whip hand of the team now, and he had always known how to drive!

The shame of Audrey had to do neither with facts nor with people. It was before something within herself that she hid her face and shuddered and sobbed—something so great that it crushed her with its greatness; so pure that her soil seemed to be indelible; so full of anguish and mercy that her heart was dissolved and melted. For one extraordinary moment she wished that if she could not be good again she might die. The next, the consolations of Larry made life more excellent than death.

And now she was burning all her boats preparatory to running away with Larry.

Even as she sorted the jewels she felt the meanness of wanting to return the gifts of Andrew whilst discarding his person! She bit her lip and laughed. "Get thee behind me, Satan," she said, as she thrust aside the diamond necklace, the emerald star, the bracelet of strange device that Andrew had brought her from Egypt. But her eyes clung fondly to the great king sapphire in a little half circle of a crown that he had brought her only a month ago from Paris.

It was the loveliest thing she had. It matched her better than all the rest; it was more like herself. There was an austere simplicity about the other things; but this—it danced and sang and lived!

It was meant for the mystic warmth of summer nights

with the glitter of electric light, not very far off. "And to think of never having worn it, not even once, and the others only at the dullest of dinners!" She sighed despairingly and began to wonder with a freakish change of mood why on earth Andrew had chosen it, with its fairy mocking suggestion of things of which Andrew knew nothing.

She was still wondering, when Andrew opened the door, and paused to look at her. In his usual humble way he had knocked twice, but Audrey was thinking so hard she did not hear him. When she started and looked up, there he was with his abominable far-away, kind smile, and this time with the most amazing and discomposing tenderness and compassion thrown in!

This was the last straw! Andrew was bad enough always, but with unexpected additions! Audrey throbbed with rage. To look like that now, as though she were a child to be petted, or an idiot to be forgiven, or a doll to be played with; and she—except for that one instant when she was longing for the sapphires, and forgot, in the very act of putting away all childish things for ever. When she felt so old and worried that for all she knew her hair might be turning grey, and her face wrinkling, and there was Andrew smiling in the most infuriating way.

She clenched the circlet with her small, strong hand. She could have scratched Andrew with it.

These revulsions of feeling were not unusual with Audrey when she looked at Andrew. Her impulses were not by nature disreputable. It was always some dim vague sense of an untold amount of latent energy in Andrew which might all be expended for her benefit that agitated Audrey.

And every minute his smile became more insufferable, and now his spectacled eyes appeared to be melting on her. This was sheer impertinence! And he seemed to be glued to the hearth-rug, and she hanging on the very edge of a precipice!

Now this was Andrew all over. He seemed to be made only to be helpless and inconsiderate, and incapable of understanding anything, and to make you feel a beast.

"May I sit down, dear?" inquired Andrew; "I want to speak to you."

Still holding the circlet, she swept the rest of the jewels behind a pillow to make room for him, and nodded. She was too angry with Andrew to speak.

He looked round the pretty room; at the simple treasures on the walls. He had chosen them with such care that they should not be out of harmony with the delicate young hush of Audrey's presence.

He looked at the old carven spinning-wheel he had chosen to match with her sedateness, at the jewels on her slender fingers; and as his eyes travelled back to hers they were dark with sorrow.

Audrey sighed.

"They've been inventing some mean little scandal about me; something must come out of Katharine's malignant three months' prowl. But goodness gracious! if they could only know how grossly inadequate their poor little imaginations are to the occasion!"

"Well?" she sweetly inquired.

"I don't know what to say, dear, or how to say it. You are not a girl to whom any man has the right to bring bad news. You are not made for such things."

"I wonder just what I am made for," she said with a quick, mirthless laugh.

Andrew's eyes, had she cared to read them, could have told her!

"Yes," she said. "Please go on."

Andrew's apologetic ways were so odd. She sometimes wondered if he were quite right in his mind.

"You know, dear, that young Forester's father made me his sole guardian." Andrew's voice was more stodgy than usual, and besides sorting the jewels she had several other things to do. She felt unusually tired, and looked very young and pathetic. Andrew could not bear it; he looked

at his toes. "It was an unusual will; there were no restrictions whatever. Acting under what I considered to be the best advice, I allowed all his money to remain in his uncle's bank. The interest offered was that legally allowed to trustees, and the arrangement was an immense convenience to the boy's uncle. The bank, I had every reason to believe, was as safe as the Funds." He paused and hesitated. "I did not like the uncle, and so was specially careful to be just to him, even although I made every inquiry. It was a fatal error of judgment on my part—there was a run on the bank last week, and on Monday the doors were shut. You would not understand, dearest, were I to explain. The details are so dull."

The ghost of his old smile played for an instant about his mouth as he glanced at the circlet in her lap. "To cut the story short, I am responsible for Forester's money, and it amounts to a large sum."

"Oh," said Audrey in a curious surprised way. "And must you pay it?"

"Yes," he said gently. He paused to collect himself, to choose the words that would least hurt her. And yet she must know! She must be made to understand! For three days now he had waited in helpless anguish. The horror of injuring Audrey was a pain so cruel and intolerable that he hardly knew how to cope with it. It was like ill-using a child—such a child as she was! so unprepared for the sad realities of life!—and yet, since the facts were clamouring at the door, she must both meet and face them.

"Yes, I must pay. It will take all we have, I think. We must sell this place and the Beeches. Fortunately, the entail was cut in my grandfather's time."

"Sell this place and the Beeches?"

She stared at Andrew, put down the jewel, and slowly stood up.

"And where—are we—are all of you going to live?" she inquired.

"I don't know—not yet. Thank God, child, you have

your little income—and these!" He glanced at the jewels. "They're yours absolutely. It's quite right," he said soothingly to some quick alteration in her face; "you need not feel one qualm. I wish they were finer, dearest."

"It's rather stuffy," said Audrey, going to the window and throwing open the casement.

She looked out; then turned to look at Andrew. Her anger against him had taken another direction.

"Do you know anything at all about business?" she asked in a light, hard voice.

"I am afraid I don't."

"And you trust everybody?"

"One does naturally, I think, when life goes well."

He spoke with hesitation.

"I don't!" she said promptly. "I look and find out and understand. Perhaps stirring up messes makes such a fine thing of life that there's no time."

He looked in great perplexity at this new Audrey.

"I know it's been my own fault, my own fatal error of judgment," he said at last, gently; "I can offer no excuse."

"As if I wanted excuses! As if I was thinking of the beastly money! As if you weren't the most aggravating human being I ever met, Andrew! As if I didn't know how much worse being your own fault makes it! And where are your sisters to go? And what do they say about it?"

"I haven't told them; how could I until I had told you? They have always worked hard," he said sadly. "Katharine, I feel sure, will begin to work again—for a short time—until I am ready to help them. That is all. It is very hard."

"Hard!" she said, with a stony laugh. "To begin again to teach little wretches she despises, and to have to listen all day to yelling discords on horrible pianos made by creatures neither of them know anything about, and are misjudging and detesting the whole time, and

one with cancer and the other all back and nerves! It certainly *is* rather hard!"

Her face was white; her laugh, Andrew thought, to say the least of it, wild.

"My poor little girl!" he murmured. "My poor little girl!" She was so young, and unproven, and fragile, so unfit for the ugliness of life! He felt criminally helpless, and she was swaying in a curious way. It was a movement unfamiliar to him in women, and very alarming. With commendable self-command he gathered her up in his gaunt arms and laid her out on the sofa.

Audrey was sufficiently alive to enjoy the experience, and in spite of her dainty delicacy, singularly devoid of fastidiousness. She was vividly, invitingly, intelligently open to the enjoyment of any new sensation. If not unconscious at the moment of her death, she would have enjoyed even that, if fittingly staged.

The sensation of being carried like an umbrella in Andrew's arms fascinated her.

"Lie still and rest, little girl," was the only thing that Andrew could think of to say, and even that he said limply. He patted her in a timid sort of way as though she were an unknown specimen that might sting. Then he stood up before her like a great lean culprit. The sight of her delicate flower of a face upturned to him brought home in a rush the unforgivable folly of his careless trust, his unprincipled kindness to the Forester uncle, worse than all his selfish insensate glee in being quit of the harassing business and free to go back to his retorts and Audrey. He had ruined the life of his young wife, and would drive the faithful women, who, for his sake had been broken, back into the strain and the turmoil of slavery.

His helpless attitude of guilt, the perplexed apology in his worried eyes, put Audrey fairly beyond herself. How dared Andrew look like that, and she just caught tight in a trap all because of his drivelling idiocy? With everything coming right, with the dawn of a new life

shining in on her, and Larry with everything ready waiting for her, perhaps that very minute!—she liked dramatic surprises and had left the time of her final step vague—and now to be interrupted at the crucial moment in this outrageous, vile, cruel way! It was impossible to move a step further in her own affair till she knew more of Andrew's. She was pushed straight up against an immovable barrier and Andrew, as usual, keeping every little atom of him that could help anyone, shut up tight.

Andrew fulfilled no want in life! Any little section of him that was ever visible to the naked eye was like the nose of a hedgehog, just something that could be hurt. One could never even amuse oneself by pricking it. It hurts too much to see anything wriggle up and squirm. If there was one thing more than another that Audrey avoided it was hurting herself by hurting either things or people!

She felt too forlorn and defenceless to be idle any longer staring at Andrew. It was a profitless waste of time! You might stare at Andrew for a year without getting one new idea! She sat bolt upright and glanced towards heaven, then returned a brand new and a most amazing Audrey to earth.

A torrent of bitter wrath dropped like dew from her red child's mouth. She showed a business instinct of no mean order.

"And then to tell me to lie still and rest!" she scoffed in conclusion. "So that's what I'm to do when the house is tumbling about our very ears and the ground being cut from under our very feet, and—and every hope is being swallowed up and it's all dark, dark, dark—not one single ray of light to guide one or keep one, or—or anything, and all the things waiting for one—things that—— You make me wish I was dead, Andrew. Everything to be snatched away in one instant."

Her voice faltered; a slow resentment, full of the oddest entreaty, grew up in the eyes she lifted to Andrew.

"It's unfair," she said; "it's horribly, abominably, sickeningly unfair. You know nothing of business, or of women, or men, or of anything but those awful bottles, and your sisters; and you take away every hope, and tell one to lie still and hold on to the presents! And that's you all over! That is what comes of being a genius. And now—even now, you're misjudging me! You are, Andrew—I'm extremely glad you're a genius. It's been my greatest comfort—and, oh, the way you're misjudging me! You know you are!" she cried, with the face of an accusing angel and the voice of a wood-dove. "You know so little of anything, Andrew, or of anyone. You have no right to judge or misjudge anything but chemicals! Why didn't you set up an alabaster image of all the virtues on the green shelf and worship that, and bring it presents from Paris, and apologize to it for losing the money; and tell it to lie still and rest in the middle of an earthquake? How you ever presumed to marry a live girl is beyond me! Oh, Andrew, go away! It's insulting to be standing there and misjudging me in the way you're doing!"

Andrew was speechless and immovable.

"I've got a telegram that I must take myself," she said, her adorable voice more calm. "The motor's being mended. Can I have the carriage—or is there any carriage to have? And when I come home I'll go to bed, no one must disturb me. They can put my tea and dinner—I'm not ill; I want my food—they can put everything outside the door.

"I can see very well that you're hopeless in this matter. I've often heard of geniuses in tight places, but I never saw one before, so I must think things out all by myself, and—make—er—some—fresh arrangements for the moment." She paused to sigh. "In all my life no one has ever helped me to do anything, or arrange anything, so I must do it, as usual, all by myself.

"Andrew," she wailed; "if you only just knew the dreadful, dreadful hole you've put me into, I think even

you'd be sorry. And, Andrew," she moaned, hiding her eyes, "don't look like that! You're simply awful!" She peered at him through her fingers. "Don't, for goodness' sake, and with all there is to be done!

"I think you'd forgive me being rude just now if you knew everything," she resumed; "the simply awful fix I'm in, and all from your ridiculous trusting disposition. At any rate," she said more rationally, "it's the first time in all my life I've ever been rude to you. I've always treated you with the greatest respect. You know I have, Andrew! And I haven't been horrid—not once, Andrew, to your old sisters. I've been rather nice, really! Never forget that."

"Little darling——"

"Don't, for goodness' sake! That makes things worse. And I'm not little; I'd be a tall woman if Katharine wasn't a Grenadier. And I'll give you your due, Andrew, you'd understand if you could. You mean well. I've always felt that. But that's not enough. You know—or I don't suppose you do know, since you know nothing about human beings—— Andrew!" A point of light shot up like magic in Audrey's eyes, softening their despair. Her voice grew rich with motherhood.

"Andrew! you can surely take all your bottles and things with you; no one, not even Shylock, can possibly want them, and any shed will do to set them up in—won't that be a great comfort to you?"

"I hadn't thought of the bottles——"

"You wouldn't, being you," she promptly interrupted; he was beginning that unbearable smile again. "But think of them now—seriously. They'll change the subject for you. If you're thinking of them you can't be thinking about losing the money at the same time. You didn't mean to lose the money, and it's only when you mean to do things that it matters, I suppose." She looked peculiarly pathetic, her eyes were thoughtful.

"And, Andrew, whatever you do, don't say one word to your sisters till I see you again, till I've thought things out."

She stood up, paused and sighed. Her anger had slipped from her; her petulance was gone. She stood, her hands clasped before her, delicate and stately like some tall white flower. A strange arresting pathos filled with a great appeal the childlike presence.

And Audrey, just as she looked then, was treasured for ever in the soul of her husband.

CHAPTER IV

"LARRY will never understand it," said Audrey miserably, tearing up her seventh telegraph-form. "Never, to the day of his death! How on earth could he? he's a man! And it's all Andrew's fault, and he deserves to be left in the lurch, if ever anyone did." She sprang to her feet and flounced over to the window. "To have brought us all into a hole like this by sheer idiocy!" she said with fiery indignation. "He richly deserves anything! But I can't go now," she added, stamping. "I simply can't, with Andrew looking like a lost sheep. Someone must take charge of him—and everything, and there's nobody but me that I can see. And it's all very well for Larry," she mused with a disturbed brow; "but I can't go to-day. If I did, I'd have to come back to-morrow to see how things were going on without me; anyone would—and all the thanks I'd get then would be to be turned out again as if I were a mad dog. There's gratitude for you!

"And to choose such a time to be ruined! and the size and importance of the muddle! Certainly, when Andrew sets about making a fool of himself, he does it to some purpose! It will take—weeks—to sort things out and set them all going on the new tack—whatever that is, goodness knows; I'm sure I don't. The awful, awful selfishness of men! Andrew to choose this time of all others! And the way Larry will be going on when he knows!"

Her lips trembled ; a tear stole out. She steadied herself and returned to the table. "I'll just have to put him off with as few words as possible," she said. "This isn't the time to be committing yourself."

"Sorry can't come to-day," she wrote. "Letter follows."

"That's it," said Audrey. "That will make him understand that the thing has become suddenly indefinite, and he'll have to wait a bit ; that's all. And such a waste of roses," she sighed. "The awful extravagance of Larry ! I wonder now how much he's spent on flowers alone to-day ? One can't be always nagging —but I meant to begin on that to-morrow ! And now——"

There was a sensation as of boiling behind her eyeballs ; the tears were plainly on their way. "This won't do," she said. "I have too much to see about, and where on earth am I to begin ?" She looked round rather breathlessly and caught sight of her violin. "There's no wild hurry for the telegram," she said. "Larry won't be expecting me till the evening. I'll practise a bit first." So she put off the drive, practised steadily for half an hour, and conquered three passages which for three days had gaily defied her. And Andrew in his laboratory listened to her with a great amazement. For the life he had now to offer her this Audrey was surely never made !

He took out a little portrait of her he always kept in his desk, and despair entered like iron into the heart of the wretched man. It paralysed effort and perverted thought. Even honest labour had lost its savour.

When Audrey had finished her last chord and put down her violin, there was a glint of compassion in the way her fingers lingered on it.

"I conquered you, anyway," she said ; "and you can shriek and howl and squall as much as you like, which is more than I can do. All the same, I feel as if I'd been whipping a baby. I can understand now," she reflected, softly touching a string, "why women get into the way of

ill-treating their children when their husbands become absolutely unbearable.

"It's extremely unpleasant," she said, suddenly standing up, "to be feeling like that sort of person. When I was young I was pretty awful, I daresay, but I used to feel sure that I was really extraordinarily nice in some undiscovered region in my own inside—children are queer things!" A dry sob made her throat crumple up in rather a startling way. "Such nonsense," she said, "when I've got to write to Larry, and don't know in the least what to say."

She went to the window.

"I wonder if I'm a fool," she said presently, looking across the gardens and the trees, and the wide heath with its clumps of pines, to the uplands and the thin veil of powdery blue, along the low, long valley to the deeper blue upon the horizon behind where London lay.

"If there was one single person in the world who could help me to decide—or to do anything; but there never is—there never has been, not once. No one has ever helped me in all my life to do anything, but now and then to be pretty horrid all round generally.

"Andrew's wise enough, Heaven knows," she resumed, after a pause, "except where banks and uncles are concerned. I wonder," she murmured with an elfish laugh, "if I were to go straight to Andrew and put all the facts of the case before him, what just exactly he'd say and how he'd look? It would be an extremely interesting experiment," she said, her eyes brilliant with intelligent excitement.

"If only one could follow one's imagination blind, what a time one might have! It's the want of imagination of other people that makes things so bitterly hard," she moaned, "and people like Larry so difficult to explain things to. I never met a soldier with an ounce of imagination, and Larry has even less than the usual run. And Andrew's is all bunged up with heavenly abstractions and Katharine.

"I wonder if I'm very low, really," she said, after a long look out, "or if I were at all like Nero playing waltzes just now on a stringed instrument, with everything going to rack and ruin round me? Perhaps Nero had his reasons like me, and as we know nothing at all about them, perhaps we haven't any right to judge even Nero; and there's Andrew misjudging me as hard as he can down there among his bottles.

"Dear me!" There were tears in her eyes again, and she felt plangently sorry for herself. "And in an hour or so Larry'll be misjudging me just as hard among his wickedly expensive roses; and between the two of them, I wish to goodness I was dead. If I'm not between the devil and the deep sea, I'd just like to know what girl ever was."

She realized suddenly that she was crying properly as hard as she could, and her courage came running back. "This won't do," she sobbed; "it'll never do. One'll want all one's wits with—the—the lot of them. Larry'll just have to rage," she whimpered, softly mopping her face, for no catastrophe on earth could make Audrey do violence to her complexion. It was altogether too right a note in the cosmic melody, and so far as it went she had a perfect ear. "No one could desert such helpless creatures," she protested. "And in the end it'll be good for Larry, I daresay. He has a horrid temper, really, and selfish is no name for him. And if he's dull about some things, he can understand, at least, about Adeline's cancer. That's plain enough, and I'll have just to work it for all it's worth, and those awful nerves that went to pieces slaving for Andrew. They must be arranged for, and so must Andrew. And I'll just be vague about time. Larry'll hate it; he's so particular about your being definite and keeping your appointments. I can't help it," she sobbed; "one can't please everybody and do things at the same time. What Larry can't understand he'll have to put up with, that's all.

"Think of what I've got to put up with myself just!"

She wrote at full speed a letter that shook Larry to his depths, and turned resolutely to the glass.

"And now I won't think any more," she said; "nothing'll induce me. The best way of fixing them all up will come without thinking. These things arrange themselves, and thinking makes everything more impossible, and gives you a ghastly headache."

So she did her hair in so new and successful a way that by the time the carriage came round life was again possible.

She drove to a village some miles away and sent her telegram and her letter. On her return, having given precise orders in regard to her tea and dinner, and armed herself with the last new novel, she retired to her room, and all the time she diligently beat off thought.

Her methods were ingenious, her courage high; but the night was too much for her. With the darkness came fear and longing, and some voice in her ears which nothing could silence. She did her best in the matter, used all her resources, tried all her wiles; but discerning at last that the thing plainly meant to be dealt with, she very wisely decided to contend no more, but to give it its head and hearken to its counsel. Realizing, however, that it is always as well to do a disagreeable thing as comfortably as you can, Audrey curled herself up at precisely the right angle, and prepared to go into the whole subject with an open mind.

To her it all seemed so simple, these new departures in interruptions, and emotions, and voices and things were surely quite beside the mark.

She loved Larry with all the strength of her undisciplined, undeveloped nature. He had moved her as deeply as it was then in her to be moved. And from Audrey's point of view that he should do so was only natural. Compared with the rest of her little world—Andrew, as we know, did not count—Larry was extraordinarily faithful and fair minded. He was kind and generous, and in spite of things Larry was really as good as anything!—Audrey could

make comparisons with an enlightened mind,—for the rest he was Larry!

They had never meant to do wrong, either of them. She had been trying, on the contrary, to do good to him, and Larry was only too anxious to be reclaimed. And never once had she said anything to Larry about Andrew, or one single horrid thing to him about Andrew's awful old sisters. If Larry somehow knew all about the utter impossibility of her life, it was not her fault—or his! And if they had done wrong, no one but themselves should suffer. They'd take all the consequences on their own shoulders; they'd face the music!

This, as we know, was the creed of these young people.

Sometimes when for a moment things looked menacing they used to say it together. It had helped them in many a bad quarter of an hour. But to say it all alone at night to a dreadful intrusive, not to say insolent, voice, somehow did not work. The voice would keep on interrupting in a fiendish way.

Audrey had got into the habit of sweeping aside obstacles with a lightness and skill befitting a more transcendental being; with the same gentle supremacy she had been able to disarm opposition.

She now tried all her methods upon the voice, but this inner monitor would appear to be the only thing peculiar to women that is incorruptible to flattery, irresponsive to pitiful appeal.

It became, if anything, more insistent than before. Audrey could not make head or tail of it. Her outlook was large. She had never been able to understand fussiness. It bewildered her. She descended at last to explanation, apology! "But I'm going to do everything for them," said she. "Set them all on their feet, give them my whole eight hundred a year in a way that they must take it. I haven't arranged yet, but I'll find a way—and all those awful jewels, too, and even the motor-car I bought myself; I'll give them everything! And when that's done, and everything's settled on a solid foundation,

so far as I can see, the sooner I'm gone the better. I should only be in the way," she wheedled. "I've always been in the way. They—Katharine's always been as horrid to me as she dared. They'll be delighted to get rid of me, and to have Andrew to themselves to make as uncomfortable as they can."

She paused—confounded. Andrew had slipped in quite by accident. She had been carefully excluding him from the discussion. He always brought a gloom into things, and shut out hope. Andrew was a clog upon endeavour, an obstacle to enterprise. After a little reflection, her better sense asserted itself. "After all, he'll have to come into it, into all of it," she said, with a curious little chuckle; "I'd better let him in at once.

"And I'll take good care they *don't* make him uncomfortable either," she said with spirit. "I won't stir one step until I've found a first-rate working housekeeper who'll give him proper food and keep that dragon in her place."

But it was just as Audrey had feared; directly Andrew came into the matter he made complications. He spoilt everything, and he seemed to be creeping every moment farther into the heart of the affair. He took her life and warmth away.

Even on this summer's night she was growing cold. It was extremely unfair of Andrew, and she trying so hard to play quite fair, and do all she could for all of them, to leave nothing undone that she could do, and then when she was no longer necessary to any of them, to go to the one single living person who could not get on without her! No woman could do more! And here was this voice buzzing, buzzing, buzzing in her ears, and all about Andrew! Andrew, indeed!

She felt outraged.

"And all Andrew's fault!" she said. "If he hadn't stranded them all in a ditch without one penny, and a dozen diseases, and no sense, I could have gone away quietly and got it over, and things would have settled down again in no time; and instead of that, here I am

racking my brain trying to get them all out of this bottomless pit, and to make them take the money without knowing it's mine.

"Imagine stacks of virtue like that living on the wages of sin! They'd mix even the wretched money up with poor Larry, who, of course, will only be the poorer by that much. It's only the women who understand—something," she sighed, "who ever play fair."

But the difficulty in regard to the transfer of her income came more keenly home to her, and she flung herself to the other side of the bed.

"It's those old things who'd be the real sufferers," she presently resumed. "Andrew will have his bottles and his messes and speculations to play about with, and third-class returns to Germany are cheap, and he'd never know whether he was travelling first or third. That's all right; it's those unfortunate creatures who make all the trouble—and it's all Andrew's fault!"

She listened in a half-furtive way for the voice. But this time it was an inexorable sort of silence that made things unpleasant for Mrs. Antrobus, and sent her shuddering into the bedclothes.

"It *is* Andrew's fault," she said. "It's his fault entirely. Why didn't he consult *me?* And as it's he who's upset the apple-cart, it is he who ought to pay for the damage. Why should I have to tell all the lies to square things for them? He'll just have to do his part—and oh! the unutterable worry of the whole thing! I'll be looking fifty by the time I'm ready for Larry, and can get Andrew to see things reasonably, and trample on his wicked, selfish, horrible pride."

Audrey was now so breathless that she had to pause, and as a precaution she thrust her fingers into her ears, and eternity dealt as it usually does with the little antics of time. The voice went on only the more clearly and more definitely, bringing in Andrew each moment with a more firm insistence.

This was very extraordinary. Audrey sat up in bed

to consider the matter. Andrew, whatever he was, had always been a purely negative quantity. Never, to give him his due, had he been the least forward or presuming. He had rarely troubled even the private reflections of his wife.

"This isn't Andrew at all," she protested, addressing the darkness and ignoring the voice. "It's the ghost of Andrew, possessed by a devil."

She listened half expectant, with a faint hope of receiving some encouraging information on the subject. Something in the unresponsive silence frightened her. She cowered down sobbing, and a glimmer of her first shame came again upon Audrey, and the same glory of whiteness seemed again to rise up about the red of her guilt, transmuting and transfiguring it. This frightened her more than ever. She shut her eyes and called upon the name of Larry, and moaned in the quiet darkness.

But, as upon that other night of a great cry, there was no sign from Heaven, and each moment she seemed to be more and more encompassed and ensnared by some secret, inexorable force, pressed upon by fingers subtle and strong, compelling her back into some dull prison where alone lurked safety.

She wanted no coercion into any dull refuge! She was fearless and free! She had never been made to crawl into holes at the bidding of things she knew nothing about, and that plainly knew nothing about her.

So she protested and entreated and sobbed, and every instant Andrew, in relation to herself, became more cruelly inevitable. Larry was being thrust further back. Her world was being turned topsy-turvy by things ill to argue with.

"I'll go to sleep," she said at last. "It's horribly and fiendishly unfair."

So still possessed by a strong conviction that neither the voice nor any other of the unseen forces arrayed against her had yielded one inch, she fell asleep at last like a tired child.

CHAPTER V

SHE awoke as usual, thinking of Larry, when right on top of him in stalked Andrew.

"This is not like Andrew," she thought indignantly, and hurriedly told her maid to be quick.

Having for her sins begun the day with Andrew, it struck her with increased emphasis that he'd be certain to be muddling something if she did not hasten to his rescue.

The way in which a few moments later she burst in upon Andrew seriously disturbed him. He had never yet known his wife to be in time for breakfast, and now to behold her fully dressed in his laboratory at half-past eight in the morning! It took his breath away.

"My poor little girl!" he said at last. "I'm afraid you did not sleep."

Audrey was sitting on his big table discoloured by chemicals, looking at him half elfishly, half reproachfully.

"Then you quite expected that I should sleep?" she inquired, with a sudden pathetic pleasure in her disastrous night. "Did you sleep yourself?"

He said nothing; her tired eyes were saying far too much.

"Andrew, I wonder what you were thinking of all night?" she said, a flash of genuine interest lighting up their limpid darkness.

"Of you, child."

"Oh! I wonder what you thought and the sort of way you thought it? I'd simply love to be a thought-reader. I wish you'd turn yourself inside out, Andrew, just for once."

Andrew looked a little stiff and awkward. This new phase of Audrey embarrassed him, and he had always found the extreme youth in many of her points of view very difficult.

She softly laughed.

"Oh, well! I was thinking of *you*, Andrew—part of the time, but as you haven't told me a word of your meditations, I'll keep mine to myself. I daresay you were thinking about your sisters too. I was—till I thought I'd burst. They're the most filling people I ever thought about. And, Andrew, they can't go back to work at their age, with cancers and things. It makes you sort of squirm even to think of it. It's impossible——"

"My dearest——"

"Oh, Andrew, don't! It's not even as if they liked girls in a mild way. They've always looked upon them as means to an end. You were the end, Andrew; girls, the unspeakable necessities. Katharine's been a besom of destruction in many a young person's life. The most awful thing I ever saw was Katharine once arranging roses. First she scoured and carbolized the vases; then she caught the roses in a firm grasp and snipped little bits off them, till they bled; and when she had taken all the life and the colour and the scent out of them, and left nothing but the thorns, she set them bolt upright in the disinfected vases, and stalked off, thankful that she'd done her duty by her enemies for that day, anyway. Think of the insatiable cruelty of letting anyone like that go back to the scholastic profession; Nero himself wouldn't do it!"

The pain of Andrew was almost greater than he could bear. Everything went to its make-up. Her swaying figure; her little petulant foot swinging to and fro; her generous, unpractical protest; the dove's voice in which

she uttered her condemnation of the good impossible women! With a biting pang he knew now what she must have suffered from the poor creatures, and yet this was her first spoken betrayal of a grievance which in coarser hands had made his life a burthen! He ought to have known it before—rather, he ought to have admitted the fact, and faced it, and spared his young wife this at least.

But this duty he had evaded as he had done others of even more pressing import. Throwing all his energies into the abstract and impersonal, he had neglected the most essential and intimate ideal of his life, that which was life itself.

In sparing himself he had involved in ruin not only this holiest and dearest of all trusts, but the poor broken women to whom he owed everything.

No man looks well in a chaos of self-revelation; such primeval experiences should be passed through in solitude, or in the presence of a sympathetic audience. Andrew, as a conscious worm, appealed to nothing in his extremely critical wife.

"Andrew," she said, "you're falling in in the queerest way. Your chest is fairly doubling up. I hope to goodness you haven't consumption. Do sit up straight and let us have this out properly. Things seem to be pretty urgent." She paused, exasperated. "Andrew sitting there tied up in a knot in this awful crisis sort of chokes you," she reflected. "I'll sit up like a poker and see if that'll have any effect on him."

"Now, Andrew," she said briskly, "I feel like a gun primed and cocked, ready to go off! So let us begin. When must everything be sold?"

"I have several offers already. It's one of the most saleable properties in the county. It may all be done in a month, I think."

"A month," she said blankly. To put off Larry for a month—goodness gracious!

"Oh, well, Andrew, don't fidget with those papers, please—please! Look how urgent everything is!"

He looked at her in a dazed way and withdrew his nervous hands. This was all so revolutionary to his experience. He found an increasing difficulty in accommodating himself to his environment. Moreover, a trustful, leisurely confidence, begotten of the unhurried contemplation of nature's methods, was but a poor preparation for the cataclysmic onrush of a desperate woman into any undiscovered region where hope may hide.

"I wonder if you've thought of anything," said she.

Nothing would hurry up Andrew. He had to think it out bit by bit. To be cross-questioned by Audrey was, indeed, most strange. Still, it was very sweet, and her voice soothed him; to watch her gave him strength. It was seldom that he got the chance of enjoying the privileges she now heaped upon him—his fault entirely; it should never happen again. He had encompassed her with love, loaded her with offerings, and then left her! This was the first time she had ever sat on his table swinging her beloved feet. The very way she sat, the curious narrowing of her eyes as she watched him, the manifestation of an intelligence in the common things of life of which he had never suspected her, her half-defiant demand for her rights in his affairs, so completely overwhelmed Andrew that he could do nothing but regard her with perplexed and worshipful eyes.

"I do believe you never heard a word I said," said Audrey with divine patience.

"I was thinking of you, dear, and that I'd never known you before, child! What a little brick you are!"

"Now, Andrew, is this the time? And I'm not such a brick as you think, I warn you, and you know nothing about me at all really. I asked you just now if you'd thought about things at all."

"I've thought about nothing else, little darling, and I've done something. I've written to a friend who has a cramming establishment, and he has offered to give me temporary employment until I can look round. The screw isn't much, but it will keep my sisters until they get

settled. They have their own furniture, you know, and you have enough, poor child, until I pull round."

There was a world of partially repressed exasperation in the way Audrey kicked out one foot.

"What employment is it?"

"I am to take the boys in science, sometimes in mathematics."

She slowly whistled.

"Dear me!" she said at last. "An usher!"

"I won't be one long."

"If you're one once, Heaven only knows! It's a fatal mistake to start as a worm. Andrew, how old are you?"

"Surely, child, you know?"

"Oh no, I don't. I've never asked. Somehow it seemed disrespectful. I'd meant to look in the register, but I forgot. You're wandering on towards fifty, aren't you?"

"I was twenty-nine in April."

She jumped on the table. "Goodness gracious! But it makes all the difference, don't you see. This is the day of the young man. Why, I was reading only the other day that people out of work in the scholastic profession over forty, cut off their moustaches and put on stays, and do physical exercises before they go to look for a situation. It's like girls in their seventh season. And to think of wasting yourself as an usher at your age! You're very innocent, Andrew."

"My child! I never meant to waste myself, but I must look round."

"I don't believe in 'must' for comparatively young human beings. You couldn't look round as an usher. You'd be too much ashamed to look at all, or if you weren't you ought to be." She threw up her head. "We're not slaves or idiots; we ought to be able to do what we want to. What we determine we shall. You don't want to be an usher. Andrew, I can't think that of you."

"Well, no, it's never been my ambition."

"Then strike out the usher and let us get on. No earthly arguments will ever take the trail of the usher off anybody. Look at your sisters, usheresses to the day of their death. Let us start on a more workable basis."

Having been brought up by three sisters great with knowledge, but whom love had passed by, Andrew had never been given the chance to over-estimate himself physically, intellectually, or morally. Thus a fine figure had fallen into a stoop. A splendid head had never taken the proud poise proper to it, and it had never even struck Andrew that he was a man in whom there was no guile. He had never in all his life done justice to himself, but now suddenly he was glad that he had a pure heart and clean hands. He was very glad, it brought him so bewilderingly nearer to Audrey.

"Andrew, do, for goodness' sake, let us get on! I believe you're wool-gathering again now, when we haven't one single moment to spare!" She glanced at him, and it struck her that he was sitting up quite nicely and looking, now she thought of it, rather young for Andrew. He interested her in quite a new way. In any case, she was beginning to enjoy herself a little.

She was becoming quite indispensable to everybody in a variety of ways. The new importance was exhilarating. It seemed to inspire her thoughts. Suggestions of wisdom she had never known she possessed were flooding in upon her. There was a glimmer of light in the darkness, and it was growing—growing! And she had never seen Andrew look so decent.

She sprang from the table, put up her finger to enjoin silence, and stood with parted lips, panting a little.

"Don't speak," she whispered. "I see—I think I see—a way. I do see it!" she said at last triumphantly. "Now, Andrew, don't speak till I've finished. Only just listen. I see the whole thing—in a sort of picture. It's quite plain!"

Her injunction to silence was unnecessary. The spirit

of life aflame in Audrey was enough to startle any man into silence.

"You have farms and shooting which you never shoot, except for politeness. Couldn't you sell the farms and let the shooting? I remember that old lawyer who came from Saturday to Monday mumbled on about the value of both."

She was again on the table, swinging her feet, and pausing every now and then for a thought to form itself. Something he discerned to be going on in Audrey arrested Andrew, and invested her words with a strange authority. Womanhood, he was becoming poignantly aware, was an eternal energy before which, once let loose, any man must do reverence.

Those little wild, foolish words of hers he had so often treasured in his memory to turn over and smile at, were now become enlightened communications, and, in any case, Audrey had been always his queen.

"Yes," he said, "the shooting is good, and those farms are valuable."

"Then they can be sold, or couldn't they be mortgaged?"

"Well, yes, probably."

"What else is there besides the house and park and the Beeches? You'll sell that, I suppose?"

"A few thousands invested in good securities, that's all."

"There's my settlement, and that's ten thousand pounds."

"That can't be touched."

"It's got to be touched. We'll want it all."

"Audrey!"

"Now look here, Andrew! I know what I'm talking about. That settlement must go." She looked aslant at him. "As it happens," she said, "I shan't want it—I can't stop now to explain. You'll know all right in time, and it's—extraneous to this occasion. And this is my affair as much as yours. It's a question of honour, you must see. It *is*, Andrew. I oughtn't to have to

remind you, and—in the end," she said, with a proud lift of her head, "I shan't lose!"

"Dearest! I know, but——"

"Andrew, this is the very first time in my life I've set up my will against yours. And you don't know in the least what my will is. Besides, I shall never want that settlement."

Andrew frowned in his effort to understand her, but he could understand nothing but the compelling earnest purpose in her beautiful eyes and the dazzling mockery permeating also those inscrutable orbs of light.

"Andrew, I'm the only single person who can help you out of this hole you've landed us all in, and you must let me do it in my own way. Have you no trust in me at all?"

"Dearest, I trust you utterly."

"Now, Andrew, I never asked you to trust me utterly, or in any transcendent or high-class way at all. I just want you to trust me in the little practical things being a genius makes you useless in. Hasn't it struck you at last that I'm grown up?"

"It has struck me dumb, I think."

"Dear me! I wish it had, then you wouldn't keep on interrupting me! Well, then, I'm grown up and in my full senses," she said, with an elfish look at Andrew, "and I tell you again that I'll never want that settlement. We can do nothing without it, and we've got to be commonly honest, whether we like or not! Now we can get on. If you gave the mortgages on the farms and the money for the Beeches, and what's invested and the ten thousand pounds to the Foresters, and promised to pay interest for the rest—the house and park is security enough even for sharks, I should think, and ought to satisfy their rapacity without selling an acre of it; don't you think?"

Andrew paused for a moment. The perfectly reasonable attitude of Audrey restored his spirit; her serenity brought his back.

"Forester is a good fellow. I feel certain he'll accept the mortgages, but as for the settlement——"

"But we finished about that five minutes ago. The grass is splendid here. There would be always cows and butter and milk. I see it all!"

She jumped off the table and stood lightly on one foot like a sweet pea on its stalk.

"There are the gardens for fruit and vegetables," she said, checking them off, "and the fowl-yards simply overflowing with food, and the house so well arranged and comfortable. Just think, Andrew, what I've done for it, and what it was when I came! I don't believe you've ever once noticed a thing. And there's the library full of books—oh, Andrew, don't look at me as if I were mad! Just wait and listen—and the laboratory full of bottles and smells and things, and my eight hundred a year to go on with, and there's you—you yourself, Andrew, with your nice scholarly, dependable appearance, and all the letters after your name, and the *pince-nez*, and all complete. Why, you're a fortune in yourself. What a mercy that you couldn't look frivolous if you tried! What queer things you come to be thankful for! Why! Andrew, can't you see it?"

"My dearest child, I can't."

"Goodness! and it's so plain. The whole place turned into a cramming shop and you the head! It stands out before me—every detail as clear as sunlight! Andrew! Have you no imagination? And not ten minutes ago you wanted to be an usher!"

"My wonderful child! To think I knew you so little."

"Look here, Andrew! I'm not quite so wonderful as I seem." She paused, and in a sudden, odd way went white. "You'll know soon enough. Let us keep to the scheme. That's all right, anyway."

"The scheme," said Andrew thoughtfully, "is perfectly feasible in all particulars save one——"

"That's the foundation of it," said his wife. "The one

thing that must be. I thought you were too well brought up, Andrew, to be either stubborn or dishonest. The scheme is sound, I feel in all my bones it is."

"It's an admirable scheme, little darling, and practical; but in any case it would take time. Such an establishment as you suggest would need much building up."

"Oh, Andrew, if you haven't any imagination of your own, won't you use mine for once? Don't you see the exceptional circumstances—this house—you—your degrees—and the world is full of snobs; anyone who isn't impressed by learning and a decent household, we can easily haul in over your page in the Peerage. We—or, surely you can do that for yourself, Andrew?" she said, with a sudden look of apprehension.

Andrew looked doubtful.

She stamped.

"Andrew, you're the coming crammer, and not I! You must buck up, don't you see? You simply must. Once you're fairly started, the affair will be yours, not mine. It's not mine now, of course," she said with deprecation; "it was only the way you—you looked, that made me put in my oar at all. I hate interfering women.

"Of course, until you're well started, Andrew," she said, breathlessly, watching him with growing anxiety—he seemed to be hanging on her words in the queerest way—"I'll do every single thing I can for you all. Oh, I'll do a lot really. I—I like schemes! I'll make things hum," she promised with courageous self-sacrifice. "But when it's all set going I'll just drop out. I should only be in the way then, don't you see, and things will go on infinitely better without me——"

"My child——"

"Oh, Andrew, how can you go on interrupting when—when—the hurry is so enormous! And you hate interfering women yourself, only you'll never say so in your family for fear of being personal——"

She fetched up short.

Andrew's absorbed attention was beginning to choke her. If he kept on depending on her in this perfectly fiendish way, the consequences——

She shut her eyes and got deadly cold. Some insidious horror seemed all at once to touch and blight the glowing life in her. She sat down quickly and tried to pull herself together.

Andrew's slower brain, quite unaware of this violent play of emotion, was now weighing the pros and cons of her brilliant project, and marvelling at her capacity.

"The scheme is all that could be desired," he said, "except——"

"I was going to say when you interrupted," she said with dignity, "that there will be difficulties which you won't like at all. You must expect to be greatly disturbed and inconvenienced. Mothers will be coming at all hours to inspect you——"

"And you!"

"Well, yes—at first, and I'll be ready for them, don't be at all afraid! I'm only wondering if *you* will. The mothers who come to inspect crammers would naturally have all their worst points sharpened by contact with hosts of unappreciative ushers who've failed to teach their sons. They'd be embittered against human nature, and would probably revenge it all on you. I've heard them at tea-parties. You'll be a necessity, but a most unpleasant and expensive necessity, Andrew, and be treated accordingly. You'll find she won't be in the library for five minutes before she'll blame you for everything. You won't like it at all. You'll be feeling horribly ashamed of her, I'm afraid, and blushing; then she'll be more sure than ever that you're the guilty party and you'll catch it! It'll take you a long time to get used to dealing with mothers, Andrew; and, at any rate, you must do that all by yourself," she said triumphantly.

"I am not afraid. At the same time, I will never do anything alone again," he said gently.

"I wish you wouldn't be always belittling yourself,

Andrew. A genius is not made to be hanging on to any woman's apron strings. He is *himself*.

"I read once somewhere," she said, with rather a gentle glance at Andrew, "that a genius must always be rather a lonely man."

"Thank Heaven, then, that I am not a genius! But, my most wonderful child, you can't live with my sisters, not in the same house?"

"I'd rather die," said Audrey promptly; "and neither can you. I haven't forgotten. They have their own furniture, and there's that far lodge that's empty and that we never use. It's very pretty and healthy. I've seen all about the drains. It's not big, like the Beeches. But, after all, they must suffer just a little. Look at us! And I'll make it all like a babies' house before they see it; the garden's lovely already and full of flowers."

"No man living ever had such a wife, or ever so misapprehended her," said Andrew, rather below his breath. "Audrey, Audrey, this is the beginning of a new life for me. Such a life as I had never even dared to hope for."

"Andrew!"

"I must, my own!" His face was transfigured; it silenced her and made her shudder. "We're standing together at last," he said reverently, "you and I, in the red of a new dawn, with the fullness of a perfect day before us."

"Andrew," she said faintly, "how extraordinary you are! Isn't it breakfast-time? I feel—I don't think I'm very well."

CHAPTER VI

NOTWITHSTANDING his fatal implication in her affairs and the atmosphere of doubt and dismay his very presence seemed now to conjure up about her, Audrey could not help hugely enjoying the novel performances of her husband.

She explained this apparent inconsistency to herself in the most plausible way. There had always been such a soul-killing sameness in Andrew that to see him now lumbering from place to place must of necessity excite the intelligent interest of any observant person. To remain unmoved by the spectacle would argue a limp and unreceptive mind.

Andrew's best original work was always done in the morning, and he had got into the habit of coming to breakfast so fully charged with it as to afford his wife in the early days some feeble entertainment. To watch Andrew upsetting his tea, mixing his condiments, answering questions at random and awakening in starts to his indiscretions, was better at least than the deadly silence.

The only time he had ever talked coherently at breakfast was during his honeymoon, and then it was only because Katharine, with a passing gleam of humanity, had refused to put any book except the Bible into his portmanteau, and had given him copious and embittered directions as to his behaviour in the new and trying circumstances.

With her voice still clanging in his ears, he had made an immense effort to accommodate himself to his environ-

ment, and had succeeded to his own profound satisfaction. He explained the geological structure of many mountains to Audrey during the breakfasts of an entire month, and in lighter mood repeated to her idylls of flowers and butterflies, at the same time taking careful notes of the most startling and new of all the wonders of nature, one, moreover, more full of exquisite suggestion than all the others. Of this side to his reflections Audrey knew nothing, however ; she supposed him to be steeped to his neck in his own elderly affairs.

Andrew could have wished the honeymoon to last for ever. But that was three years ago, and since then he had had more urgent matters to keep him silent, and Audrey had long ago grown tired of watching his social lapses and recoveries.

And now to see him fussing round and bringing her things and taking care of her just as though he were a real man, although it hurt and terrified her not a little, yet greatly amused Mrs. Antrobus. She glowed and beamed, her eyes danced, smiles trembled in and out of her dimples.

" Andrew," she said at last, " I wouldn't, if I were you. The tools of your own trade are far easier to manage than any of those applicable to a person like me, and far more in—the er—divine line—that's what you call it, isn't it ?—for you. But it's mathematical lines you believe in, Andrew, isn't it, and not divine ones ? "

" Dearest child, eat something."

" I'll eat everything if you'll sit down," she said, helping herself largely to kidneys. " I once read a story of a philanthropic elephant, Andrew, who found a partridge's nest just deserted and the eggs getting cold—some wretches had killed the mother—so being a mother herself the elephant sat down on the eggs. Don't look in that surprised way, Andrew—you're not really like the elephant—in appearance. If your sisters had been full-blown human beings they'd have made you understand that you were quite splendid really, and then you'd have looked

it. It's too late now, I'm afraid, for you ever to become a professional beauty, but you're like the elephant in never having been built for a foster-mother, especially to the like of me."

For some reason of which she was ignorant, by some power unknown to her, the strangest sorrow slipped into Audrey's light voice, tears sprang to her laughing eyes, her dimples were ironed out.

This was idiotic, so she left her kidneys, jumped up and went to the window, flicking a fly as she passed off Andrew's hair.

Andrew mutely marvelled and as mutely adored.

"We're all looking for something, I think," she said presently in her very lightest voice, coming back to the table, "and if we look long enough we'll find it. It's not like the pot of gold under the rainbow," she said with an abrupt, sharp protest; "don't look as if it was, Andrew, and make me feel hopeless. You always make me mix myself up with fairy tales. I'm just a fairy tale to you, Andrew, and no more. And you're extremely inconsistent, for if you take hope out of a fairy tale, you may just as well take all the rest, too. Oh, can't you see!" she said, drawing one polished shoe sharply along the parquet floor; "the thing one wants most is the one real thing in the whole story, it's there—actually waiting!—waiting!—waiting!—until we have courage enough to believe in it, and then to go out and get it!"

Her voice was soft again, her grave mouth even a little tender. "I'm perfectly certain you'll find what you're looking for, Andrew. Aren't you listening? Haven't you been listening to one word?"

"Dearest, I'm listening to every word."

"Then don't look amused as if I was saying funny things; I'm extremely serious. Goodness!—if only you knew!"

Andrew's face was growing articulate in a horrible way, but she refused to listen to a word it said.

"You'll find your thing in your profession, in your

bottles, and your calculations—and in yourself, Andrew. I believe there's a bottomless pit of most interesting things in you, Andrew, in your own inside—but you'll never find it in the little light fringes of things. You were never made to be sitting on trumpery eggs or running round after people who don't matter. It's never been a real part of your mental equipment. It's all just leaked in by mistake, and it'll leak out again quite naturally if you'll just give it its head. Andrew, I don't want an egg; you've forgotten, apparently, that I've already eaten one, and do, do listen in an understanding way. If you stick to your own job, Andrew, you'll be very happy, and rather great, I say! I believe you'll be quite great, Andrew, but you must stick to what suits you and not be wandering off into things which don't concern you at all. Of course, the pupils are all right," she explained hurriedly to his unconvinced face. "You'll rather enjoy seeing them making messes and telling them about the repulsive objects down there you'll never let any one clean up, and trying to kindle fires of enthusiasm in the most unlikely quarters, would interest anyone. The pupils will be an extremely healthy interruption to your real work, far better than meddling with what you would never understand—and which even if you did, would be certain to disappoint you in the end."

Her bewildering new interest in himself, her charming gift of illuminated nonsense turned upon *him*—upon his great ungainly figure so unsuited to sport or horsemanship, or any of the amusements of his caste, still less to chaff, his spectacled eyes—at that moment he detested his *pince-nez* with all the active bitterness of a vain boy—they were an insult to himself, an insult to the radiant, the most marvellous youth of his peerless wife. This internal revolution swallowed up the words of Andrew and made him look rather foolish.

Audrey wriggled and sighed. This, after all her efforts!

Andrew, with a deprecating movement, took off his

glasses and squared his shoulders, and in the most extraordinary way the action touched his wife.

"Andrew," she said, "I do believe you'll be great." Her eyes roamed carefully over all his person. "I'm certain you will—and you'll like it. In spite of having every atom of wholesome conceit drilled out of you, you'll like it immensely. You look most awfully nice without your specs—and really quite young! It's not you who's like the elephant, after all, Andrew, it's Katharine."

"Audrey! Do you want me to be great?"

"It's the one single thing I do want. It—it would square everything."

"Then, beloved, with your help I will be great."

There was panic in her eyes.

"Not by my help. That's not good enough for you, Andrew, or for me," she added with an irrepressible manifestation of the elf. "You're the last man living to make a footstool of any woman. You must be great *alone*, all by yourself. Nothing else will ever fill your life—or give you the proper sort of satisfaction. If you hadn't been sat on too long by an elephant, Andrew, you'd be as proud as Lucifer and would scorn anything you didn't win entirely on your own. If you hadn't been a genius, Andrew, and brought up by Katharine, I do believe you might have made a soldier—a serious sapper, you know, simmering with ideas like the man who took me into dinner on Thursday."

"But, dearest Audrey," said Andrew blankly, "he's a deadly old bore."

"He's nothing of the sort. I thought so for the first three courses, but I have more faith and hope and charity than you, it seems, for he came to himself at the fourth. He only wants understanding, and a genius is the last person in the world to understand another on a different track."

There was a look of disappointment in Andrew's eyes, but he said gently, "Will nothing less than the best suit you, then?"

"Nothing less," said Audrey with airy finality; "so you'll just have to give yourself up to your career without one moment's delay. It's very urgent, Andrew, more urgent than you think!"

The unaccountable moisture behind them made of her eyes veiled stars. In looking at them, Andrew felt the greatness she demanded already within his grasp.

"Come out in the garden, child," he said. "There's plenty of time until the pupils come to idle a little."

"Not for you," she said hurriedly. "You'll never be able to idle again with any real comfort to yourself. And besides, I've got to go to London. I'm going to motor up. And, Andrew, I'll be back to dinner. I promise," she said, with the oddest little break in her voice.

"But, darling, you always are!" said Andrew.

The exquisite child was growing each moment more worthy of analysis, and yet he thanked God each moment more fervently that she was a creature whom neither he nor any other man could ever hope to analyse.

"You look very white, little child." He peered closer. "I wonder," he adventured; "I wonder if you wrap up sufficiently."

"It's June," she said, "and the thermometer is at seventy-nine degrees in the shade, but I have a new chiffon ruffle, and I'll put it on if you like when I take off my dust cloak.

"And I'll drive myself," she said, when she got upstairs, "at full speed. I despise the Force, you can talk it out of its sternest convictions in five minutes, and it couldn't happen to me to kill so much as a chicken; it couldn't possibly! And when I see Larry, oh—things will arrange themselves!

"I must see these people here through," she sighed. "That's the one single thing to be perfectly sure about. And, goodness knows, it's enough, and I've just got to keep my mind glued to it," she said, picking up her gloves.

CHAPTER VII

SHE drove at prohibitive speed entirely without misadventure, alighted discreetly at her Club, and sent man and motor about their business for the whole afternoon.

"Now I'll wrap myself up in the ruffle and go," she said, appraising the effect in a long glass. "It's the prettiest I've see this summer. I wonder if things ever get quite so beastly for really good girls? But I said I wouldn't think, and I won't, so there!"

Her eyes were peculiarly quick and diligent that brilliant morning. A thousand trivial things seemed to impress themselves sharply upon her memory.

As she came out into the hall she noticed that the face of the hall-porter had lost a little of its monumental calm, and there was no apparent reason why it should. The emotions of the women floating round seemed to be in a state of quiescence. They looked as though they had received the right answers to their letters and were expecting the right men to luncheon. They could have no reasonable excuse for harrying Brown as they often did when things went "aglee" with them. Brown was a good husband and father; she had long ago found that out. Why, then, should he be looking pensive?

She paused to ascertain, and managed to leave him with a more serene brow and a broad grin. But as she went out she despised Brown. To be looking like that on account of an eighth child being down with German measles seemed so trivial with real tragedies afoot.

Larry's rooms were in Bruton Street, so she decided to walk to them by way of Bond Street, and remem-

bered for years a hat in a certain shop she knew at a glance to have been made for her, a tea-gown in one near it, a bracelet rather like one Andrew had given her; it reminded her with a sharp spasm of resentment against Andrew that she had not even finished sorting her jewels yet, and since because of Andrew's insensate folly she had just given up all her money, even looking into shop-windows had become a purposeless pursuit. Andrew took the taste out of everything, and the significance! Then she came upon a bunch of girls' faces drinking in London, and in an instant they, too, had woven themselves into the warp and web of her life.

"I look just as good," she said, fetching up short at a window a few paces away from theirs, "and I'm a million times more interesting. I wonder, if they only just knew, what they would say. They wouldn't say much," she mused, with a furtive glance. "Country-breds wouldn't demean themselves by discussing such a subject."

She flushed with wrath.

"That's the sort they are. You see it in the way they fasten in their flowers. That brands them."

But the fresh young eyes were all shyly fixed upon her; she was one of the sights of London none of them could ever forget.

Audrey was undeveloped in everything save her innate womanliness. She could never resist honest admiration. She nodded and smiled her smile of enchantment, and went on walking more beautifully because of the watching eyes.

"But why should they hurt me in this fiendish way?" she asked. "It's not fair. They know nothing about anything. It's extremely impertinent in such people to have an opinion at all. I'm just as good as they are, really. Somewhere out of sight I am—I am! I am!" she protested, head in air. "I used to feel I was, and it's a feeling you never forget. You don't bring it back, all the same," she concluded, after a slightly discomposing pause.

In order to change the subject, she carefully examined

a blouse, but the subject refused to be changed; besides, the contemplation of a withheld blessing is never very consolatory, so she continued her stroll.

"Anyway, I could be a thousand times better than any of the three—except—except for—Andrew. They're only half alive really," she pursued. "They're afraid of everything. They wouldn't be in it with me for goodness only——"

She brushed the rest aside, and took a surreptitious glance at the heads now all glued to the panes of a fur shop.

"They've never in all their lives let themselves go. They've never once thought their own thoughts, or wished their own wishes, or looked out of their own eyes. They're dear little bits of their mothers, and grandmothers, and nice Protestant fathers, in country clothes. They couldn't possibly want to be—oh, well—me; for they couldn't possibly even conceive what I'm like, or what I want, or what's going on in me. If you have no imagination, and no enterprise, and no experience, and are only half alive, how dare you judge anyone except your own ridiculous little self?

"And it's all Andrew's fault," she said, after rather a long pause. "If he hadn't made hay of everything, we'd all be happy by this time. Things would be settling down nicely; his old sisters would have their hands full fencing with the curiosity of the county and letting the choicest morsels slip out. They'd realize their ambition and be the centre of attraction to a select neighbourhood for once. Goodness! Think of it! And Andrew——!"

The horrible inevitableness of Andrew once more wrung the heart of his wife, but she refused to bend to the intolerable tyranny of so remote and abstract an idea as Andrew.

She paused to call reason to her aid.

"He is beginning to drift into an extraordinary sort of intimacy with me," she admitted; "and he's doing it in a way no one could ever have foreseen; but it's only be-

cause he's slacking a little in the general muddle, that's all. He'll pull himself together directly I've put things straight for him and am out of the way. No human being could possibly get far enough into Andrew's life to upset it for very long together. Andrew's unstrung for the moment; I seem to have disturbed the surface of his fathomless mind, and it's the worst thing possible for his investigations. It must be most confusing for a person like Andrew. The delay for him is quite as bad, in a way, as it is for Larry; I'll just tell Larry so! Up to this Andrew's always looked at me through a telescope," she pursued. "If he took to putting me under his microscope with the worms—Goodness gracious!" she gasped.

"This delay is fiendish for every one of us, and it's cruel and unfair when one wants to do the best for everyone. To be getting ready to turn his microscope on me, when this very minute he might—he might be regretting his rash experiment in an unknown species, is—it's too unjust for words!"

Audrey looked very proud as she said this, but she felt humble. No bravery of word or look seemed any longer able to ward off Andrew. He was slowly and insidiously encroaching upon her. She was now very near Larry's door and her heart beat faster.

"The rooms will be full of roses, and there will be lilies-of-the-valley in the silver bowls," she said as a sort of charm to keep Andrew in his place. "And if I can't be happy even for an hour," she pleaded, "how on earth am I to get them all fixed up, or make Larry understand? He'll think I don't love him, in the way I do, if I let anything come between us. Men can't see things. They're blinder than puppies. And, after all, he's given up a great deal for me—poor Larry!

"Why must loving hurt you like this?" she said. "It's like an ache, and having to stay and pull them out of their hole is like an ache too. I'm all aches all over, I think. And Larry'll be blaming me—*me!* Everybody'll be blaming *me*, and I'm deadly, deadly tired; and if I

weren't going to Larry," she murmured, as she went up the steps, "I'd like to be dead."

Her arrival lifted Larry from a mood of great despondency into one that promised but little true discernment of her moral needs. She had gone through a great deal that morning, and pined for consolation. Dazed, half swooning in the grasp of passion and of her great love, trembling in the ecstasy of his touch, with a little smothered cry, she nestled close to Larry. Like the young animal she really was, she could now see only through her senses. She forgot everything, save only that Larry was hers and she Larry's, and in this fact consisted heaven. Her pity was lost in love, her scheme of benevolence swallowed up in kisses. She had no word, no protest, no smile. Love was too real to her. It was as real as death. Even with Larry's arms around her she felt that it was, and like death. It seemed to her, as though her life, with one rending agony of surrender, was all going out to Larry. She quivered and sighed. The thing was too big for her, and with each moment it grew bigger. She seemed to be pledging herself to shadowy immensities, in which she had no part, to be playing for stakes—to be gambling with powers too high for her, too high, too fierce and compelling. She clung closer—closer, and Larry held her tight. Her emotion profoundly moved him; he was infinitely tender to Audrey.

But suddenly she was afraid of Larry, mutinous against what she knew not. She tore herself almost violently out of his arms, and sat up and shuddered.

"But what's up now?" he said. "You're all anyhow, little girl. You want a lot of looking after."

And then upon an impulse so unprecedented as to be a revelation to herself—and Heaven alone knows how much more to Larry!—she primmed her lips and a flood of the most wonderful new words of wisdom poured through them. She might have been steeped in wisdom from her birth. Larry gasped and made a disordered effort to

caress her into silence. He could as easily have held back a wave with kisses. He was really alarmed.

What she said was indeed vague. She propounded no scheme, formulated no definite change in affairs. It was the leaning towards an uncompromisingly Puritan standard that characterized her utterances, queer glints of virtuous desire that ran in and out of them, dark suggestions of some sacrifice of self apparently of an all round nature, which seemed to be embarrassingly imminent, that struck Larry dumb, and then of a sudden Audrey slipped from her rhetorical phase and burst into tears.

Whereupon Larry was himself again, and soon the tears were dry and hope aflame. This lasted until the telephone-bell called Larry. Larry left her with a stern command not to make a fool of herself while he was away, and directly he shut the door the voice began.

By this time Audrey overflowed with courage, and what was a voice, after all, when you are braced up by the rapture of kisses! So she gaily defied the undefiable, which went on quietly turning her which way it would, until at last, with a baffled laugh, she paused to listen. She had to listen to a good deal, and to nothing in the least agreeable. But no matter what the contest, the scent of battle was sweet to the nostrils of Audrey, and this unseen enemy who fought with her seemed to be wanting everything she had; so she sat straight up amongst the roses and contested every inch of the ground with a horrible suspicion that she was making no way at all. The voice wanted everything, everything! It would accept no compromise, it was inexorable. It wanted all and would give nothing! The very immensity in these insolent demands excited the girl; the curious feeling of being in grip with the biggest thing she had faced enlarged her consciousness. Suddenly in the beautiful room, full of roses and rare and exquisite and delicate things bought for her by Larry, she herself stood up visibly before her own eyes alone, solitary, a creature of infinite significance, upon whom all things waited, who held in

her hands to give or to withhold all good things and all evil. But first she must give up, everything, everything; keep back nothing! She shivered and shook. It was like Ananias and Sapphira. She was much too clever a girl not to have read her Bible, and some of the stories in it had always made her feel extremely uncomfortable.

The vision faded but the voice began again, dinning into her ears, clearly and definitely, all that not ten minutes ago she had been reeling out to Larry, she was now aware, with somewhat artificial incoherence.

She had found an adversary as invincible as herself, it would appear, and as artful. She laughed, and in a moment was invigorated. And then Larry came back, and his face was now also the face of one who glories in a fight, and it helped in its turn to confirm the mounting courage of Mrs. Antrobus.

"Where is your luggage?" he said; "and what have you done about your car? Have you sent it back?"

"Larry, sit down here beside me. I'll hold your hand, dear. And now be patient and listen. I have a great deal to say to you. Oh, Larry! Poor, poor Larry! You won't like it at all."

Larry was rigid with consternation. He had important affairs of his own to think of, and he had never seen her like this before.

"Audrey! for Heaven's sake——"

"Oh, Larry, won't you be patient when I ask you?" With many explosive interruptions from Larry she told her story, and Larry's fresh face turned grey before the narrative had hurried to its conclusion. There was the most extraordinary air of finality now in Audrey, and she was afraid of something—Audrey!—something she could not herself have defined, but it was real to her; the whole thing was real. Of that Larry was sure, and so, in spite of himself, his face grew grey.

"But, Audrey, little darling, it won't do," he said at last very gently. "You have the ways of a kitten, dear, and the heart of an angel, and more courage than any

bristling female who ever grew a moustache; but it's my business now to take care of you, and see that you don't go sacrificing yourself for any mad idea. It's an awful story altogether. I'd do a lot to do something for that poor creature with cancer, but I have you to think of. I have to make things as straight as I can for you. My little girl! my poor darling Audrey! I wish to God I'd taken better care of you at the start."

"It was my fault quite as much as yours. Do let us keep to common sense."

"It was not, as it happens. It never is the woman's fault; but that's not the question now. I have news too. It was Capel who telephoned. He's just come from the War Office. The rumours about the war are growing like gourds, he says, and we'll be in South Africa before you can say 'knife,' and our regiment's the first on the roster. You can't go back, Audrey. There's not a minute to lose. I want to take steps to marry you, darling, before we go, if it can be put through anyhow."

Larry spoke in a new voice, there was a glimmer in him of something she had never seen before. It silenced and bewildered Audrey; it made her tremble.

"You can't go back—not now, child," he said.

Audrey sat still and white, her hands had grown cold in Larry's.

"Larry!" she whispered. "Oh, Larry! Larry.!"

He was chafing the little hands.

"I wouldn't ask you, Audrey, I swear I wouldn't, dear. I'd let you go back for a month only for this, but a month now means everything. It will be a close shave, anyway, with the long vacation in sight, but I'll go to Antrobus myself. I'll go to-day. He's a gentleman, and with this war—at the door, and the chances—you know, dear, I think he'll play fair. I daresay he's a good old fellow at heart really. I think he'll do the right thing by you."

"He's twenty-nine," she said drearily. "Isn't it funny?"

"But twenty-nine! Why, good God ——"

"He's only five years older than you, Larry."

"By Jove! This is a rummy go. Well, perhaps it'll make things easier to explain, and, thank Heaven, he's a gentleman."

"Even for a gentleman," said Audrey with an elfish laugh, "the situation might be rather disagreeable."

"Audrey, Audrey! Don't, dear! Whatever he may think of me, he'll see you can't be left, not now. He's a man; he must see. My God! but I'll see that he does!"

"Wars never break out as soon as people think; someone is always crying wolf long before anything happens."

"Not this time, darling. I know two men who've been out there for the last five years, who say the only wonder is the idiocy of the people here not knowing that it must come. They've been pestering the War Office for three weeks now, and if the War Office believes in it, it's come pretty near, I tell you. Oh, we're in for it all right—any day now. Of course," he said airily, "it won't last long. We'll soon teach 'em. I'll be back in no time, but there are the chances, of course. I must make things as right as I can for you before I go, Audrey."

He fidgeted a little and got very red.

"In a way, dear, it's better for us," he said tenderly. He pushed his chair away and knelt down beside her. "Put your head here against me," he said, "and don't look so white. Oh, Audrey, don't, child; not now. You're not losing courage now when things are all on the turn? Can't you see it's better, little girl?".

"Well, no, I can't."

There was a wry look about Larry's mouth. He flushed deeper and bit his lip.

"You must know that I don't mind a hang what I give up for you, Audrey," he said; "you're giving up enough for me, God knows! But the thought of having to leave the regiment has been pretty infernally bad, I tell you."

"Oh!" said Audrey faintly.

"I never once regretted it, my own—not once, any

more than you regretted—anything; but, you see, nothing could prevent it's being a beastly grind, you know."

"But—but—must you have left?"

She broke off with wide, terrified eyes fixed on him.

"One must, you see. We're pretty straight-laced in a queer way. Besides, it wouldn't do for you, dear. You can see it wouldn't. Women, you know——"

"Oh, go on! I know—now."

"If I'd gone," he said eagerly, "I'd have made it all right, you know. The property does want looking after. But now," he said triumphantly, "it's all right, right as rain—another story altogether. Other things won't count now. We'll all be wanted, especially our regiment," he said proudly. "They can't do without us, and fellows get chances in a war, you know. I think somehow that I'll do well," he said, flushing again. "It's my chance, I think—and, in a way, it's yours. It's ripping good luck for us, little girl."

She sat up, her eyes still wide and full of trouble.

"I didn't know you'd have to do this—for me," she said. "It's more than—if you gave me your life, I think. One doesn't like taking such big things. It's low. It's like—like—comic opera girls—who want all they can get," she said, frowning.

"Audrey, this isn't reasonable, darling—not like you——"

"Oh, it's like me, all right," she sighed; "but whether it's reasonable or not is another thing. I didn't know people were so very particular."

"It would be a pretty big scandal, you know, little darling, and lots of fellows—the Colonel is one of them—draw the line at—er—divorces, you see."

"Oh, I see! If I had been one of the girls I saw just now, Larry—in my own clothes—it would have been better for you."

"Don't be ridiculous!"

"I'm not. The very idea of being like any of them

makes me squirm; I should get so tired of myself, and you'd get a great deal tireder; but at least there'd never have been the ghost of a scandal, not the remotest reason for the Colonel to turn you out."

"For God's sake don't, Audrey, when everything's all right now, and would have been in the end in any case."

"If one could only combine everything! Being oneself and having all one wants, and looking all right generally, and always having the right influence on everybody. But it's no use. You can't have everything, and some things seem like bits of yourself; you can't cut them off and leave them behind. And if I were the least atom like one of those girls—oh! Larry! Larry!"

"But since you're not, darling," said Larry soothingly.

"I can't bear doing active harm to people. It makes me feel horrible. If you'd had to leave the regiment, Larry, I should have had to keep on hating myself. And then," she said, half sobbing, "the most awful things might have happened."

The suggestion was cryptic, but there was genuine terror in her eyes.

The mere thought of doing active violence to any part of her own being was a potentiality so fraught with profound tragedy that Mrs. Antrobus's slight frame quivered in the most piteous way. It took Larry all he knew to restore her composure.

"And now you've got to think of our chance," he said, "and leave the rest. I'm glad I'll be going out with them, not sitting on my heels doing nothing. My God! but I'm glad," he said, lifting up a gallant face.

For an instant she looked at him with heavy eyes. "I'm glad you're glad, Larry. Perhaps I shall be glad myself presently."

"But think of me having to sneak out after them later on in some beastly Yeomanry corps, if it lasts long enough for that. You'd hate that, dear, like the devil. Look here, Audrey! I believe this will put a lot right for both of us. Do you see, little girl? I feel somehow that I'll

do well. It's—oh, well, it's like a sop to Cerberus in a way," he said, reddening and giving a quick, shamefaced laugh.

Suddenly Audrey sat up straight with brilliant eyes

"Larry," she cried, "I simply must go back. There must be time—afterwards. I can't leave them—not now. If I did, I'd have to go back. They'd haunt me. And if I did go back, they'd turn me out, and then I'd be no use to anyone, not even to you, dear. With them helpless and penniless—oh, don't you see? I'd die—I know—or—do something. I must stay and get things settled, and make my miserable money sort of—of—inevitable. Oh, I'll find some way of squaring Andrew about it. I know I shall."

"Audrey, this is madness."

"It's not madness," she said at last, "but I have to do it." She turned two frightened eyes upon Larry. "It's like this, Larry, I have to. I have to go back." All at once the fear slipped out of her eyes and a great light shot up in them.

"Larry! Look here! This is my chance. It's to me what the war is to you. It's *my* sop to Cerberus. I want to crowd all the things I've always forgotten—the things that other girls never forget once—in all their lives," she panted, "into this month—not in their way! Goodness forbid! but in mine, my own, own way; and afterwards, between us—we'll be happy, happy, happy!—with nothing mixed in to spoil the happiness the whole of the rest of our lives. We can't spoil our happiness now, Larry, when it's so near," she said in little jerks.

"If this isn't stark staring madness," said Larry, springing to his feet, "Heaven alone knows what it is! Here's the chance of a lifetime to square everything. There's not an instant to lose. And, Audrey," he said, taking her tenderly in his arms, "it may not be only us—dear—we two—now."

"Do you think I'd forgotten," she cried out in a dreadful voice—"forgotten that chance?"

"But, darling," he said, holding her to him, "that decides it. It must decide it."

She shuddered in his arms.

"Larry! Go away! Don't touch me. Sit down there," she entreated, and in spite of himself he obeyed her.

"It doesn't decide it," she said. "Even that doesn't decide it. This is my month. I've got to take it. It's mine. Oh! Larry, it is, and if you won't give it to me, I'll have to take it; that's all. It's something inside me, I think. I hate and loathe it," she cried passionately, "and I love you. I never knew until this minute how much I loved you. I—I wonder if one's heart could break with love? I love you as much as that, Larry, more than ever I loved you before, and in a different way. Just now, when I looked at you, Larry, you looked rather like a devil; I'll say that for you! But—" she knelt down and laid her head against his breast—"but I sort of knew suddenly that we two, you and I, were sort of meant to be good. Oh! Larry, don't! The sort of good that would suit me would never bore you, dear; how could it? But somehow I know just as I know that I must go home. It's our chance just as much as your going to the war is, and we've got to take it."

The arguments that arose in Larry's brain died upon his lips. She compelled him to silence, to obedience, this fantastic, foolish, light creature, with such sorrow as no words have ever spoken, upon her young face.

"God!" he said; "what's a man to do?"

"Help me to put on my things, I think; that's all. I've got to go to them, and you've got to put up with it, and to do your own job. Larry! You pulled half my hair out with that clasp. Oh! Larry, if those three girls were rolled into one, they'd never love you half as much as I do, for all their goodness!"

"Audrey, will nothing move you?"

"Larry! Try to understand, dear heart, I've *got* to go back."

CHAPTER VIII

AT eight-thirty that same evening Audrey was diligently peeling walnuts. She did not want them, but they kept her eyes off Andrew, otherwise she would have been forced to watch him. He was acquiring a shuddering fascination for her, and to-night he looked fifty: if he went on ageing in this diabolical way he would be decrepit before the month was out. She felt keenly exasperated. It was so inconsiderate of Andrew to be making things every moment worse for her, considering all she was doing for him. She pinched a walnut hard and wished that it was Andrew. It would be rather interesting to watch the effect of a real pinch on Andrew, the sort of pinch she would give Larry without a moment's hesitation if he annoyed her. This opened out Andrew in an entirely new light, hard and dazzling; it made you hot and uncomfortable. She was beginning bitterly to resent Andrew, his entire ignorance of all the issues involved in this pregnant month, and the consequent unfairness in her own demands upon his forbearance and intelligence. She laughed softly.

"Why didn't you tell me you wanted to go to town to-day," she inquired with irrepressible elfishness, "and ask me to drive you up?"

"It didn't strike me, dear. Besides," he said with the queer, awkward look that always made Audrey want to shake him into a human being, "you look so absolutely free in your motor. Both when you ride and when you motor you look—like the spirit of the wind."

Audrey flung a pathetic glance upon Andrew, but Andrew's eyes were on his plate. Andrew never ventured upon any expression of his emotions, but he suffered for it and always took the hidden hurt inseparable from Audrey, as part of the sacred mystery of womanhood. In wretched shyness he now devoured an apple he did not want.

"Just as I said," she murmured; "I'm a fairy tale to you. Did you ever read any fairy tales when you were young?"

"I hadn't much time, dear child."

"Oh, well—it was short-sighted policy on the part of the philanthropic elephant. You ought to have got over all that while you were young. A belief in fairies born out of due time is disastrous. And when you turn wives and —business—shall I include business—Andrew, into fairy tales—why——"

Naturally Andrew did the wrong thing—he winced, and Audrey, feeling greatly outraged, hurried on:

"Oh, well—things happen, you know. Do you want any peeled walnuts? I have a large supply I'd like to dispose of."

"No thank you, dearest."

"Andrew, you haven't a digestion? I've always forgotten to inquire."

"Apparently, so have I, so I suppose I haven't, dear."

Her melodious irrelevance soothed the ache left by her gay stab. It was so sweet and new. The melody in Audrey had hitherto breathed itself out in silence mostly, and in the dreams of her husband.

In spite of the pain her words brought him, he hoped that during this time of trial she would not go back into the silence. In a vague way he knew that it is always in the empty silence the sense of a man's loneliness grows heaviest. He did not remember to have had any empty silences before his marriage. The child was supplying, it would seem, the want she had herself created.

She was the point of life whence life grew up, of light

which pierced the darkness; and if the life hurt and the light blinded, she was a woman and holy, a creature designed to make men humble.

To be, as it were, circumference to centre, to such as Audrey, was surely much. Until this crisis he had hardly realized that there was more, that his position was an unique one. That to be triumphant sovereign over a world of marvels yet unconquered, might well give a man pause, and if dwelt upon, revolutionize his outlook. The feet of Andrew, in common with those of his wife, were also upon the threshold of a new life. "You're quite right, really, Andrew," she pursued, slanting her face to look at him behind the flowers. "There is a good deal of fairy tale in the present position of affairs, and some Arabian Nights. Aren't you listening?" she inquired with studied politeness. He was wandering off again into some queer hedged lane of his own. "There's a good deal, too, that must be put before these sick old women with a light and airy touch; administered to them, you know, in the guise of a fairy tale, not clapped on to their minds rigidly like a moral essay."

"Audrey, child!"

"Do—do listen! The situation must be let down on them like the gentle dew from heaven, not like a brutal hail-storm. The dew will drench them just as effectively as the hail could do, before it's done, but it'll do it in a much nicer way. Andrew, you must see by this time—if—if you're human that—that it's I who must tell your sisters everything, and not you. You'll hate it, but you'll be glad in the end—you'll be extremely glad; and if your sisters weren't themselves they'd be gladder," she grimly added.

"It will be a most painful scene, and it is my part, not yours. Audrey, I must spare you, at least, all that I can."

"Andrew!" she said, standing up. "Don't go back to the bottles just yet. Come into the drawing-room for once and talk some common sense."

"Sit there!" she commanded. "Couldn't you sit comfortably," she pleaded, "like any other sinful man? Oh, Andrew!" she sighed, "you might have a lovely time before you, if only you knew how. Oh, well you don't, so let us go on now about those poor old things. Andrew, how precisely would you break it to them?"

"Dearest, I could only tell them the truth."

"But if you did, don't you see Katharine 'd snort like a war-horse; the prospectus for the new school would be out in a week, and she'd go on till she died! Neither God nor man would ever force back her awful energies once they broke loose again. And in her heart she'd be thanking God for the chance of earning the martyr's crown you wrenched from her grasp. But all the same, Andrew, I've been watching her, although she's never forgiven you, and never will, for interrupting her terrible march to Heaven, and wouldn't lie on the lovely soft sofas you gave her, for years, or eat the good food, just to annoy her poor flesh that doesn't even know how to sin; yet, now, in spite of her iron mind, the flesh has got the upper hand at last, and now she does really rest and really enjoy the doctor's visits, and his medicine. Goodness gracious! don't you believe me? If you weren't so full of bottles and things you'd have seen it all in her old eyes. In spite of her religion and herself, Katharine's got a little bit of rest into her tired eyes at last, and it's taken her all these years! Why on earth can't people get to Heaven without having to wade through Hell?" she said passionately. "Why should true Christianity be something that hurts yourself and everyone else horribly? Talk of devils!—there's some natural politeness about a devil, and, anyway, he doesn't nag." Her face was white; her scared eyes looked into some region of which Andrew had never dreamed. He felt most ineffective in a general matrimonial way, and as an instructor in Theology, singularly unfit. What could a simple Agnostic do in such a matter? At the same time he was deeply distressed.

"My poor little girl!"

"I don't believe God's like that in the very least," she said, not to Andrew, but to that dim something so far and so pitiless that would not leave her alone.

Andrew, torn by his great compassion, bitterly regretting his incapacity, touched the mutinous hand of his wife.

"I know so little of these things, dear," said he. "But because you are, I feel sure that whoever God may be, He is very good. You are most wonderful, child. You have grown suddenly in one great bound. It is the way of all good women, I have been told."

"I wonder who told you," she said, with a broken laugh. "Was it the P. E.? The other words are so long, Andrew, we'll abbreviate the title in ordinary conversation. And if you think I'm developing a latent taste for making myself uncomfortable to please a great Juggernaut of a contraption who wants every nice thing you have to appease it, you're very much mistaken—on the wrong trail altogether. Oh, if you'd only let *me* guide you!" she sighed. "And I'm not a good woman, do remember that. It'll save you no end of future worry and annoyance. I'm developing a sound business instinct I always knew I possessed, and if you'd developed your outside eyes in the way you've done your inside ones you'd have seen it long ago."

"My darling! I wish to God I had!"

"Andrew! For goodness' sake don't shrink up inside you like that. You don't suppose I'm thinking of the loss of the beastly money. Goodness! If that was all. I have rather more important things than that to be thinking about."

Andrew's short-sighted stare was not altogether inexcusable, but it unloosed a new train of unpleasant reflection in the breast of his wife.

"Oh, Andrew, if you'd only keep on being absorbed in your own affairs and leave profitless emotions! Suppose, now, anything happened, you know—and, oh, well,

I didn't happen—to be on the spot, and the show had to go on all the same with the vigorous and orderly swing in which successful concerns must go, do you think for a moment that twisting yourself up in knots would—er—do the trick ? "

Of this melodious tirade Andrew grasped only the melody.

" I'm a clumsy fellow, darling, and by my criminal neglect——"

" You're yourself, Andrew, and sure to run amuck in human affairs. You're a thing apart, don't you see."

" I certainly don't ! "

" That's the worst," she said sadly. " You don't ! Oh, well, it can't be helped, but, at any rate, I'll explain the affair to your old sisters. You look so bewildered. I wish you'd understand."

As he stared at the adorable face Andrew wished that he could.

" I haven't one unkind thought about your losing the money," she said slowly. His brow grew no clearer. She sighed. " How extraordinary you are, Andrew ! You want to have everything explained to you. You can't explain things, especially if they haven't quite happened yet. Besides, er—some things might require a great deal of explanation before you'd understand them. I—I—just want you to take a reasonable view in general—of this world. It's a tremendous help when—er—sudden sorts of things happen."

Her responsibility in Andrew was closing in about her like a wire net that hurt and bruised. It put him in an ever-increasing new and forbidding light. Even his mode of apprehending imminent events in her own disastrous yet unavoidable absence was expanding into a grisly horror. Mrs. Antrobus seemed to be constrained and pressed upon by malign and insidious forces, resolved upon making every step on her road to freedom, about as disagreeable as it could well be.

Andrew, who had not counted at all practically a week

ago, to be suddenly turned into an octopus on her hands, with tentacles of unmanageable and immeasurable activity. Andrew, quiet, self-engrossed, harmless Andrew!

It was a cruel and hideous transformation foreign to any experience.

It is hardly to be wondered at that in face of such an obstacle for one memorable moment the stout brain of his wife reeled.

"It's your unlikeness to other people," she murmured at last, inadvertently aloud; "a sort of sinless—er—shell." By his start she became aware of her indiscretion.

"Oh, well, I'm certain your sins were all purely scientific! If you knew some of the people I know—goodness!"

"My dearest, I know several people!" He was looking at her possessively, like a young lover. This was intolerable.

"Oh, I know you've met them," she said hurriedly; "but that's another story. If you knew how difficult it makes things!" she sighed.

Andrew reflected for a moment upon that world from which he had saved this curious child. "How little she knows of it," he thought. "How sweet she is, and how undaunted! But I wonder what precisely she does mean!"

There was something in her face so young, so like that of a child wide-eyed with some wonder of new knowledge which they who watch her know to be as old as time, that Andrew laughed aloud.

The superiority in Andrew's laugh was so tragically ridiculous that it made Audrey feel rather giddy. At any rate, it silenced her for quite a minute.

"Do let us stick to urgent things," she said at last. "Andrew, I simply must explain! That's all."

"It would be a quite impossible situation for you, Audrey."

"I must do it all the same. Oh, dear! Can't you see? If you knew anything about human women you'd see by the look of me that it's all been settled from the

beginning." Just for an experiment she emptied the full contents of her illimitable eyes upon Andrew and watched him being swamped in the novel experience. Before such forces the strength of man is but as water.

He made a motion as though to leave the room; he felt that he must be alone amidst his gods to lay this gift, this crown of life and of creation, upon some secret altar.

"But, dear me, Andrew, where are you going? We'd better explain things to ourselves first. You saw the lawyer, and he said that it could be managed about the settlement. Are you sure, absolutely sure?"

"I'm quite sure," said Andrew, flushing. The flush made her wince. She knew its highly inadequate cause. "But his saying so makes no difference," said Andrew.

"It makes all the difference. I was afraid there might be bothers. Andrew, I should be low, a common thing, if I were to hold on to that settlement. Take my word for that now! You'll believe me some day. You'll see I never spoke a truer word," she added, with grim emphasis. "And now we know where we stand."

"I have promised nothing; I cannot make up my mind to the course you suggest."

"You're not taking things in the right spirit, Andrew. And you *have* promised—practically. Anyway, you've got to, now."

She stood up before him, her hands on her sides like a determined child. "I won't let you stir from here until you do promise. It's the crisis of our lives," she said with dry lips.

"It's a terrible situation for a man; you must see that it is, child! Audrey, I'm pulling myself out of a pit of my own making by—by your petticoats."

"You're doing nothing of the kind; you're taking your rights."

"I am breaking a trust to save myself."

"Not yourself—not you! It is the others, those poor, tired, sick old women; they've broken themselves for

you, Andrew! I wonder it's not written on your brain! And when they've begun to rest at last—after all these awful years! Doesn't that strike you?—the awfulness of it—that they had to learn to rest!"

"It has touched me so deeply, Audrey, that I have no word to say about it," he said in a low voice. "And that you should have found it out in this way, with those eyes! Oh, my God! that has touched me more deeply still."

"And yet you make difficulties!"

"It's an insufferable necessity," he said abruptly.

"To take what belongs to you? It's common sense. And even if it is unpleasant," she said in another voice, "I don't want to be a beast; but you do deserve something, you must know you do. And—in future ages—if it still weighs upon you," she said with a malicious twinkle, "you can give it back, you know. Anyway, it's our only road out now, and we've got to take it, and that's all been certain from the first, and all this arguing unnecessary. It's useless contention. And now, since even your maniacal pride must admit that you deserve something, will you please promise—a sort of permanent promise—not to upset any present arrangement later on, whatever happens? It takes all one's spirit away to see all one's trouble made hay of, even in the future for some unpractical—er scruple. And this scheme is sound—you'll admit that, Andrew. I know the unpleasantness of baffled pride, but that can't be avoided. Now, Andrew, promise, promise to leave things as we've arranged them—no matter what happens!" Her face was alight with eagerness. She came close to him and caught his hands; she swayed, her breast heaved—she was a child fighting for its life! a suppliant at the feet of mercy!

"But, darling—why——"

"Oh, promise!"

"I promise—but——"

"Don't spoil it with 'buts.' You promise faithfully, knowingly!" She could hardly get her words out. Andrew watched and listened, perplexed, moved, en-

thralled. She looked very beautiful. An immense desire to kiss her made his eyes swim, but she was so precious a trust, and the heart of Andrew was full of reverence and had been chastened by Katharine.

"I promise faithfully, knowingly! Dearest, what am I to know?"

"Oh, never mind, promise!—and in your right mind! You are in your right mind, Andrew? Honest injun! You're certain?—sure? Well, now, promise one more thing and I'm done. You mustn't ever, in all your life, tell your sisters that I've given up my £800 a year, or—or prevent them from using it."

"Prevent their using it!—no, indeed no, my generous darling; but I particularly wish them to know what you have done. Audrey, I should like my sisters to know you, child."

"They'll know me all right in time! Meantime, just promise! Quick, I'm so tired—I—I feel giddy! Oh, promise!"

"I promise—for the moment. Some day, Audrey."

"Yes, some day! Meanwhile, you've promised—properly."

"Yes."

"I'll sit down; I feel all anyhow! And to-morrow," she said slowly, "we'll go and see them together, and I'll do all the talking. We'll go in the morning before they're tired.

"And then we'll build up, you and I, Andrew, the beginning of the most extraordinarily fine scheme that'll get back all the money in time, and give you plenty of leisure to make the most magnificent career for yourself. And you've promised, Andrew; never forget that you've promised to carry out all the provisions of the contract!"

Andrew laughed.

"I wish you weren't an Agnostic," she said, "or I'd make you swear it all on the Bible; but the word of a gentleman is enough, surely!"

CHAPTER IX

NOT very long before this time the very sporting career of one of Audrey's friends had been rudely interrupted by an illness of a most annoying nature. It necessitated constant repose on a couch full of scientific inventions. A hideous contrivance quite unfit for polite society. It soothed the aches of the invalid, however, and smoothed the wrinkles acquired by her undeserved sufferings.

It came in the very nick of time. If she had remained on an ordinary sofa a week longer, being sensibly alarmed upon a variety of scores, and obsessed by some recent literature upon occult subjects, and since it was necessary to her temperament to be impressive from some point of view, she had decided to employ her enforced abstinence from active mischief in the practice of the contemplative life in a lawn cap. She felt sure that in common justice the fact must leak out. Now, however, her restored energies began to run into more natural channels. She sent for an artist to drape the couch, and had it wheeled into her boudoir, substituted a light evangelical for the more strenuous creed, and set to wearing her martyr's crown with great ease to herself, and much edification to those others not deemed worthy as yet to compete for the prize.

"Between the springs of this contraption and the *kudos* you're getting for Christian resignation, you're enjoying yourself immensely," said Audrey one day, after a careful examination of the machine. In the course of

her investigations she had given the potential saint more than one good cause to squeak. Audrey had reasons of her own for distrusting the validity of Mrs. Kenyon's conversion.

"Even undraped, it's pretty dear," she said, trying a spring; "but I'll have to get one for my sister-in-law, I think. Considering all the time you have on your hands, Lilian, and no clothes to try on—it'll cost you a fortune in corsets before you even begin again, poor dear!—you might have faked up a more exhilarating religion than that you've been expounding. It's like an Irish stew made of curates. An inside artistically redecorated only a month ago ought to do better than that. I hope to goodness the seven job devils haven't got in! They might from your look, dear! If I had your chance of holy retirement, instead of having to work like a horse to keep my family from the poor-house, I might invent a fancy religion of my own. I've often wished to."

"You're wicked beyond words, Audrey," whimpered the invalid.

"I don't look wicked to the naked eye," said Audrey to Lilian's glass, as she altered the set of her hat. "And I feel friendly to all the world, which is more than you do, dearest. Between the chunks of Irish stew just now you took away three characters. Lilian, you'd really like me, now, wouldn't you, dear, if I gave you the chance to take away *my* nice little character."

"I hope I should pray for you, Audrey."

"Oh, you'd do that, too, especially if you knew it was irretrievably gone. It's easy to pray after the event, but it's better to do something sensible before it; so I'm going straight on to Eileen Adare to tell her that it's all lies about Johnny, that he's tremendously fond of her really, and only endures that Sue Despard from the Gaiety because he's been made miserable by the lies of the righteous."

Lilian was livid.

"You'll betray a confidence!"

"Oh no, I'll not. I don't do things clumsily. My worst enemy can't accuse me of that. But I'll never rest till Eileen and Johnny see things in a reasonable way. Being a pious invalid needn't make you give a busy woman all this trouble, Lilian. When I've done with Eileen, I'm going to find out about the other two. I hate playing about with fairly decent reputations with all the outrageous ones available. It's very poor sport, really; all the herrings in the world could never smell like one good fox. I like the real thing in everything. Don't cry, Lilian." She came over to look. "I thought you weren't, not properly, but even that sort of thing plays Cain with the muscles about people's pretty little mouths.

"You're as pretty as paint, Lilian, with lots of points; you beat me in some, and you must be nice, or Jim wouldn't spoil you as he does; and it's all habit taking away people's characters, I think. I wonder if everything's all habit? Buck up, Lilian. There's Jim, and don't bore him with your religion, dear, until you've touched it up a bit."

Whatever she did Audrey did quickly. Before the week was out the estranged couples were reconciled and the couch bought. She had not an idea how she was going to pay for it. She was in debt already up to her ears. She cared for none of these things as a rule, but suddenly the fact of being in debt for a half-human thing so incorporated with twisted pain, and one that had drawn such a perfect agony of gratitude from Adeline, began to vex her. The debt embittered the gift; it wasn't fair to Adeline. She began to cast round in her fertile mind for a way out of the dilemma other than the bank, for the moment impossible, and had almost prevailed upon herself to make over to a friend who had long hankered after it, at any price, a very favourite fur cloak of her own. Then Katharine's altogether unjustifiable behaviour to her and Adeline, her quiet, corroding jealousy, and the unworthy modes of its manifestation, so worked upon Mrs. Antrobus, that in order to pay back Katharine in fullest measure

she fled to town and discharged her debt by bridge with ruinous stakes. To give Audrey her due, she did not gamble in a general way, except to amuse herself; but with Katharine the ruling spring in any outbreak, what could any one expect? And in the end the half-chuckling knowledge of how it had been paid for greatly increased her already real pleasure in the gift.

Shortly before the present crisis in the affairs of the Antrobuses, Adeline was lying on this unholy gift under the bright shade of a great ilex-tree, murmuring always delicate memories of the south; soft shafts of sunlight filtered through the branches, catching the coolness of the polished leaves, yet carrying golden messages from the very heart of the sun. It was just that day four years his unexpected inheritance had fallen to Andrew, and a year since Audrey had given Andrew's sister the couch. The instant they put her on it Adeline knew that it was the very thing she had so long waited for; she could have cried with joy. She need now no longer be beset with swooning fear lest the slightest move, the lightest footstep, should jar and torture her; no longer turn cold lest too sudden a hand be laid on the coverlet. In this merciful haven of rest she could feel safe and protected. She knew all this quite well. She was immensely grateful both to God and to Audrey. But she could not rest; she could not let herself go, and drop thankfully down into the cunning invertions of the friendly bed.

The soul of Adeline was too rigid to throw itself helpless into the Everlasting arms, so her poor body—its forlorn form—found it difficult to abandon itself to anything less inflexible than duty. It was afraid, just as the soul was, to trust itself utterly to any but an iron rule. She had been careful and troubled too long, poor Adeline! to dare either mentally, physically, or spiritually to sit idle at the feet of Christ, even in the sleepy hush of a summer's morning. The soul that has never rejoiced can no more find rest in God than the body whose shrine it is. Her

attitude of angular discomfort inside and out exasperated Audrey into many an extravagance, and sometimes drove her to town when she would have liked much better to have stayed at home and amused herself with Adeline.

Adeline was a revelation of grim marvels, so bewildering and unexpected as to be weirdly "chic." She was the youngest of the three, and intellectually the least developed, so she had always been given the odd jobs. She was used for sudden emergencies, and never quite knew when she should be wanted. So her little snatched rests had alway been fraught with great distress to Adeline, sometimes with disaster. Thus the sunny hours were still grim monsters to the recumbent figure, too frail now to break from the bondage of old habit. The sudden strike of a clock always made her start. She felt sure that she must have dozed off and forgotten something —a lesson, perhaps. Sometimes she sat bolt upright, and started a score of agonies. She had surely forgotten something this time, and Katharine's step was on the stair !

She had kept well her dreadful secret, and had worked, with dauntless patience for years. She had troubled no one and shirked nothing, but since the time she was thirty-five she had lain uncomplaining and mute, day and night, under the ban that has blasted the life of many another portionless gentlewoman, the knowledge that one day she should become a burthen. This hurt her even more than the mortal pain !

And then the great change had come, and rest poured itself, like the oil of anointing, upon her path. The couch came and her pain was assuaged, and yet she could not rest, this daughter of pain.

She was amazing, also, in other ways to Audrey. Adeline could hardly be said to be a personality at all. She was the faint echo of the passionless morality which stands for an unprogressive Protestant past, the victim of duty and an overwhelming present.

It was Audrey who first suggested to her that she had

any royal rights at all, in anything, much less in herself. And before she knew where she was, she had begun to yield her will in a multitude of little matters to a certain airy form of suggestion peculiar to Audrey, but in her vital principles she was adamant. One of these was an inexorable conviction that now although the day of active work was at an end, God demanded of her her mornings. It did not even strike her that God could ever relax in this obligation He had put upon her, no matter what her mood, or how high the thermometer. She would as soon have expected Katharine to suffer slackness in these things as her ancestral God.

And to attune one's soul to the company of holy men for all the long hours of a summer's morning is not always easy to one faint with weariness, who has not yet learnt to rejoice in the Lord. And so one morning Audrey, who was feeling pretty miserable herself, and anything but good, came over by way of penance, and found Adeline lumbered up with books and utterly demoralized by grief and weakness, helplessly crying. In utter despair the poor creature, with broken sobs and every word wrong, tried to explain to Audrey the nature of spiritual dryness!

Audrey stared. She removed every book, rearranged the pillows and picked some roses. Then she sat down and delivered a little homily.

"Some people are never satisfied," she said. "Not content with building up a God who's nothing but a stack of your own prejudices, you must be turning Him into a slave-driver, and an incapable small-minded one at that, who doesn't believe in honest effort at all, and trusts in nothing but His own omnipotent whip. He must always be hustling. He's the worst sweater I ever heard of, worse than any Jew. He's the king of sweaters, I should think."

"Audrey——"

"Well, I'm not religious. You can't accuse me of that! I've got all my ideas of God from you—and others. When He's not whipping you up to your duty, it seems He expects

you to be whipping yourself until He comes round again."

The poor lady hid her face. Audrey slid down comfortably against a grass mound and buried her nose in a red rose.

"It's so irrational," she said. "No God who made the roses could be the least like that, and if you don't care for roses—perhaps Katharine put you off them by the way she handles them—there's the sky. Oh, Adeline, do, for goodness' sake, look at it!" said Audrey, as she turned over on her back, and her dainty glances seemed to gather in all things. "The sky could keep me occupied for days if I had nothing better—nothing to distract my attention; and there are the trees besides, and the sun playing with the shadows, and the sound of the stream, and the red roofs of the village, and all the little sounds of babies and hens and dogs, and things growing; and think of the trout under the bridge, and that butterfly perfectly idle in the air, and that little wretch, Johnny Hodges, skulking in the bushes instead of being at school, as happy as a cricket. And if that's not enough for you, goodness gracious! you've been good all your life, Adeline; there must be the most delightful things going on inside you that not even pain could keep down. I haven't been good any of my life, far from it, and yet they go on in me sometimes." There was the queerest, half-mocking apology in the beautiful eyes she turned to Adeline. "Being good always hasn't much advantage, that I can see, unless it keeps the supply from getting jumpy."

"Audrey! You don't understand," cried Adeline, when at last she could speak. "I'm infinitely thankful to God, and to Andrew, and to you, dear; I do know you are kind, dear Audrey. But oh! if you only knew—knew even just a little of God!"

"Not of your God. I don't want to know anything at all about Him," said the girl in a low, fierce voice, her grave lips smiling. "A slave-driver, who won't let you rest even when the whole world is calling to you to rest!

rest! rest! after your honest, hard, good day's work. It makes me squirm, Adeline, when I think of the way you worked, and the way it must have hurt you."

"Oh, Audrey, I was strong once!"

"How long ago, I wonder? As if I didn't know how much it hurt, working at things you had no taste for, and never saying a word for all those years about the pain. "I always know how much pain hurts," she said with a shiver. "I say, Adeline," she cried, sitting up suddenly with the elfish look she reserved as a rule for Andrew, "do you think that could be God—the God of the Antrobuses working in me?"

"Oh, Audrey——"

"Dear me! I thought you'd be quite pleased to think of me squirming under the iron heel of Providence. Adeline, I wish you wouldn't. I'm a beast, I daresay, but if only you'd be sensible, I could be quite nice. I could amuse you and keep the pain away, but what's one to do with such different points of view? Don't you see you adore what I despise—a Creature who's harder on you, one of His sincerest followers, than a rank bad human being would be. What chance would I have in such a *galère!* And here are you wanting to deliver me—me! who never did an honest day's work in my life, into His clutches. You've been working all your life, you've practically killed yourself for Andrew, and all the thanks you get from your awful conception is to be made cry this perfect day because you're too tired to read depressing books about Him. They are depressing, Adeline; I've tried them. Don't you believe me? You may, then. I could pass a better examination in them than you this minute. I like digging into other people's experiences; don't you see? I've been trying to find out what makes them give up joyfully everything that makes life worth living, and go singing to the stake. It's fascinating, you know. You've given up everything, Adeline, and would go to the stake without moving a muscle; but somehow," she said, narrowing her eyes, "I don't think you'd go

singing, and that shows there's something rotten in the state of Denmark."

"Audrey!"

"It's your fault probably, not God's. He's one of the Truths of the world. Most of the biggest things have been done for Him, and done singing—things that no one could ever have done for a slave-driver with a common mind. I'm sure it's your own fault," she said dreamily, her long lashes dropping on her pink cheeks. "You've added up all your own pain and your own sorrow, and built it on to the original construction of prejudices and limits and fears built up by the other Antrobuses, and call that God. You've built in all the awful things, and left out all the nice. Don't you see the simply awful unfairness of it, Adeline?" said Audrey, lifting herself on her elbow to ascertain how Adeline now looked.

By this time Audrey had become a sort of Lucifer in petticoats to Adeline. The poor thing shuddered and was enthralled.

"Plainly something made that butterfly above your head," cooed Audrey. "Look, Adeline! quivering with joy because the sun's shining, and something lets even the drones get fat, and something made the roses."

"Audrey!"

"But they're there, and who made them if God didn't? And why don't you build that God into your image of fury and destruction? It's the God who made the silly things and lets tired people rest who appeals to me."

"Audrey, you frighten me!"

Audrey stood up to look at Adeline. The sight made her feel cold all down her back.

"You look exactly as if you'd seen the devil!" she said. She was unaccountably angry. It was ruthlessly unfair of Adeline.

"It's horrible to have this effect on people," she said, "and it's certainly a quite new experience to me. This is what comes of trying to make religion a little cheerful.

I wish I'd stayed in the hammock or gone to town." The blank tragedy on the face of Adeline, considering all she herself was enduring just then for all their sakes, without any qualifications for that sort of thing, hereditary or acquired, exasperated Audrey to the point of distraction.

"Adeline! for goodness' sake don't look like that!" she cried piteously. "Listen to the thrush in that high bough telling you things, if you won't believe me. The thrush hasn't any false doctrine, and he's thoroughly domesticated.

"Isn't it funny, Adeline," she said in a brisker voice, remembering of a sudden a less poignant grievance, "that in spite of the way I manage the house and the difference between then and now," she said with a sweeping gesture, "that not one of you has ever said one word about it—not even you, and you're not jealous of me, like Katharine?"

Adeline was stricken dumb.

"I wonder if you ever praised the girls, not officially on speech-days, but to themselves in the way that makes people dance inside them? Oh! I thought you didn't. You couldn't; it wasn't possible! Silence was always your only defence, poor Adeline! The others were afraid of the God of the Antrobuses. You were afraid of yourself. He's infected Andrew too—in a way; this extraordinary Heirloom!"

"Don't, don't—say any more for a minute; oh, Audrey, don't!"

Audrey went for a stroll amongst the roses, and Adeline tried to pray, but between her and prayer came Audrey and her religious opinions. She shuddered and hid her face. And yet that God, who made the roses strangely fascinated the weary woman. She recoiled and returned. She faltered and stood firm, and the thrush trilled out a radiant measure and slowly, slowly into her tired soul there crept a half-tangible foretaste of some mystery of joy, that even now—now, after all these years, might still

be hers. By some soft pressure of themselves her weak arms went out to it.

At last she opened her eyes to see Audrey softly whistling, a rose amidst the roses.

"But—but—she's terrible," gasped Adeline. "She's not good. I've been afraid even to think of it—but now I know. Oh, I know! Oh, God!" she said. "Oh, Audrey!"

She closed her eyes and two tears burnt through the lids.

"And yet," she said, "God did make her—and—and she knows things that I shall never learn—here."

When Audrey came back she strewed the couch with roses.

"They'll remind you," she said, "and when they're withered, don't let Katharine tidy them away. Put them into your little silk bag, and I'll take them home and make *potpourri* of them. Here! I'll put the roses and the bag quite near so that you needn't even move to get at them."

Adeline half lifted herself. Her face was alight with wonder and fear and a shuddering new knowledge. She took hold of Audrey's hands gathering the roses in about her.

"Audrey!" Her voice was almost inaudible.

"You're not good! You're not good. I don't understand—I don't understand—anything at all. Only I know. Oh, you're not good, poor child! And yet," she whispered, sinking back, "for the first time in all my life I love you—dearly, dearly; I have to, Audrey; I can't help it. And yet—and yet——"

"You've never looked for any goodness in me, and you couldn't recognize it—my sort of goodness, if you did," said Audrey at last in a little frozen voice. "I—I have a horrid temper, but I can't hurt things, and I'm an extremely good housekeeper. The servants like me, and so they do their best. They hate Katharine, and so they did their worst. And, any way," she said, with an

unregenerate grin, "in future you'll give even your God credit for a little kindness and common sense, and you'll never cry again a whole summer's morning because you're too tired to read books about Him. And—why didn't you love me before?"

Without further parley Audrey went away looking very airy and proud. Adeline could hear her singing as she crossed the brook.

She came afterwards at intervals that varied in length. And Adeline knew—oh! but she knew!—and the more she knew the more dearly did she love Audrey, and she no longer cried because she could not read the words of holy men, for now they seemed to sing in her heart, and in thinking of Audrey and praying for her she at last found rest.

And now Andrew and Audrey were coming to her across the lawn, and seeing them together made her heart stand still with joy.

CHAPTER X

KATHARINE'S heart, as she watched the advancing couple, did anything but stand still with joy. It rapped out the most strenuous disapproval.

"Coleridge," she said with prim tartness, "was right when he said that the wisdom of a nation is contained in its proverbs. 'You cannot touch pitch and not be defiled.' Andrew has spent his week in gadding, and is now giving up even his working hours to dally with his wife. As I happen to know, his paper for the British Association is precisely where it was last Thursday, and that important experiment of which he was so full last week has gone no further. If through her Andrew becomes practically a failure——"

"Dear Katharine, please," pleaded Adeline; "they're coming." Katharine proudly composed her face.

Katharine, being Andrew's godmother, thought herself justified in annotating the progress of his work during his absences from his laboratory. Her knowledge of facts was monumental, and had always been of great value to her brother. It had saved the fretting genius of the student from many of the worries wholly inseparable from any dealings with the infinitely little; he was used to the ways of Katharine, and had nothing to conceal. Her impertinent suspicions, indeed, offended his taste, but were as a drop, after all, in the ocean of his gratitude. Moreover, he knew that Katharine, in her domiciliary visits, came in by a private door rarely used, and he cherished a simple belief that Audrey knew nothing at all about them, and could not, therefore, be disturbed

or affronted by the unjustifiable liberties taken by his unhappy sister. But the prowlings of the conscientious godmother were only too well known to Audrey, and had a most unhallowed effect upon her. They touched all her pride, and most of her worst passions. She laid boyish and undignified traps for Katharine, and more than once brought that chaste and scholarly lady to open shame. She was always careful, however, to keep her own active share in the painful *dénouements* devised by her wit an inviolable mystery.

Her part was to appear serene and unruffled for the purpose of making delicate and courteous inquiry at precisely the wrong moment for Katharine, who hated her in consequence with all the resourceful virulence of a righteous and well-stored mind.

Her hatred was both personal and professional. Katharine, feet upwards in a tub—sprawling on all fours amidst a chaos of china, was an object scarce calculated to exalt feminine attainments in the eyes of the rescuing housemaid. Catastrophes so unworthy were, for obvious reasons, made known on neither side to Andrew, but even his limited powers of observing human nature were practised enough to give him certain vague glimpses of the truth in passing events. He was sometimes aware of sudden spasmodic efforts on the part of Audrey to benefit his sisters, of presents she bestowed on them, and arrangements for their comfort she brought about. He was aware also of Katharine's almost violent recoil from these attentions. She had, indeed, more than once appealed to him to stay the hand of his wife in the embarrassing matters.

It was an ever new surprise to Andrew. "Why should they wish to thwart the child in her benevolent amusements," he would plead; then seize his hat and fly. He could not understand Katharine, or her attitude. Not only did Audrey deny herself to placate poor Katharine with pretty peace offerings—for what offence it would have puzzled the poor man to conceive—but she gave

grim dinner-parties for Katharine's especial benefit; dreadful occasions which tried even him.

It was all part of the sweet and sacred mystery that enwrapped this wonder he called his wife; and why his sisters would not accept Audrey in, at least, somewhat the same spirit was an ever-increasing astonishment to Andrew.

She was as new to them, surely, as to himself, and if rightly apprehended, might be as renewing. An angel had alighted in their midst—a creature of fire and dew, and, lo! their one sentient desire in their fatal bondage to old habit was to break her in with bit and bridle!

Even Andrew saw that, and now, as he beheld Katharine rise up in her unbending stateliness to greet them, he profoundly regretted his promise and throbbed to disburthen himself of the secret that must even before that awful judgment seat, justify and exalt his wife, lower the proud crest of Katharine, and perhaps open even her great heart! Once opened to Audrey it could never close again, and from henceforth life would flow on for all of them in friendly harmony. As Audrey kissed the unyielding cheek of Katharine and bent like a delicate flower over Adeline, a verse of Scripture he had long forgotten floated up out of the depths of Andrew, suggested probably by the leonine quality in Katharine's fine head bristling under the caress: "A little child shall lead them." In the ecstatic vision he clean forgot the occasion, so Audrey sailed in, took the lead and prepared to do all the talking. She had confidence enough, but in order to feel rather more worthy of being guardian angel to the afflicted than of late she had been doing, she crouched down beside Adeline, and got as near to her as she could.

The attitude made Katharine snort.

"Why, you have not suffered from spinal curvature long ago is quite a puzzle to me, Audrey," she said in her well-modulated, sonorous voice. "Your irresponsible treatment of your figure is, to my mind, rash."

A pert reply rose readily to Audrey's lips, but an alert prick from some deeper instinct silenced it, and the fact of Andrew's reverent contemplation of her in character of guardian angel was becoming quite engrossing.

"I'll begin those exercises you showed me to-morrow," she said, the very breath and essence of sweet reasonableness; "but to-day is so full of urgent and difficult things that even one's figure doesn't seem to count for very much. Andrew said that I might tell you just how things stand, and since they're pretty horrid for all of us, please—please," she entreated, "let *me* get everything said before you begin."

Then in language very far from academic, but very much to the point, she stated the position.

The manner of her rendering of the tragic narrative, in spite of her artless recourse to slang, was, indeed, so informed by the wisdom of the serpent and the innocence of the dove, that in watching and listening the face of Andrew became transfigured, and Katharine, at first completely stunned by shock and horror, after one glance at Andrew, was filled to the brim with lurid suspicions.

"For some terrible reason of her own she's cajoling Andrew," she thought, and, for the first time in her life, was stricken dumb.

Adeline, in a silent agony, prayed for Audrey. Now that rest had come at last to her, she lived in clearer airs and saw as the spirits see. It was not Andrew whom Audrey was trying to cajole with her silver tongue, it was God. Even the money that was to keep them together, to give back to Andrew the place that, in his folly, he had forfeited, was Audrey's. Adeline's new-found vision could pierce through every subterfuge. She knew! she knew! and the mighty love in her new heart ran out to seek and to save that which was lost. It caught Audrey and encompassed her, and held her close.

And Audrey forgot her worthlessness, her pose, her elfish delight in deluding them all. She forgot even her own stake in the throw, Andrew's magnificently simple

admiration, and uplifted by the love and the knowledge of the poor creature who knew nothing and whom no man had loved, for one little instant she was as good as she looked. She sprang at a bound to the level of her high purpose. She was Audrey fresh from the heart of God!

With regal courtesy, full of pride and a fine humility, she subdued mutiny, dominated dissent, diverted argument, quelled hatred, moulded temperament; she arranged for them all, and forethought for all of them.

But at last Katharine wrenched herself free from the enchanted exaltation that seemed to be possessing them. "She's like an inspired devil," thought Katharine; and this broke the spell for Audrey. She fell back with a flop into the webs of earth.

"And, after all, it *is* a sop to Cerberus," she said, with a queer little grin, "and pretty mean; and Katharine has the eyes of a basilisk, and she knows."

In a sort of panic Audrey leant nearer to the only one of the four who had any conception in the least near the truth, and found renewed courage. Adeline had never taken any active share in the family counsels. She had watched, and waited, and obeyed, but now the spent voice lifted itself up and she spoke steadily. All her nervousness concentrated itself apparently into her diffident touchings of Audrey's hair. Physical contact with girls had always alarmed her. Between the inert brain and her who strove to stoke it into activity, there seemed to be a great gulf fixed. She had been yearning all her life to cross this gulf, but what has the incubator, after all, to do with the chicken *per se?*—to hatch out potential energies was *her* part, so she had never dared. Her present flutterings about Audrey's hair was her first visible effort in this direction. And now it was only despair that made her bold. Before the terror of Audrey's dark soul those of her bright head had suddenly become as naught, and so enterprise was let loose. Some day even, she felt with an absurd leap of her spirit, she might even

take out all the hairpins and watch the shimmer of the red gold flowing out into the sun. The thought gave her courage to take one look into the complex, awful mystery of the sweet young face. She almost smiled when she remembered that once she had been afraid of Audrey's *hair!*

She fixed her eyes firmly upon Katharine, and spoke to her alone.

"It's no use pretending that this isn't a heavy blow to all of us," said Adeline. "It is, but it must fall more heavily upon Audrey than on anyone else."

"Really, Adeline——"

"Dear Katharine, please let me speak. I know that Andrew has always been like your own child. He is more to you than many a son is to his mother, and it's of him you'd naturally think first. I know—as you do—that in spite of all we can do, or say, or think, that Andrew will always blame himself for this. He will forget all he has done for us and remember only this, but the fact of his thinking, what he surely will think, will, I believe, in the end help him, everything will help him, but perhaps this reverse more than all——" She paused to gather in her forces, and a light in her eyes that none of her surprised audience had ever before seen, prevented even Katharine from interrupting her, and now her hand ceased moving, it rested softly on Audrey's head. "It will establish and strengthen him, I think; it will bring out the best in him, and in making his career, and working for what, hitherto, he has found more easily, I think Andrew will do great things, and soon, in going forward, he will have no time to look back. Perhaps Andrew is to be congratulated," she said, smiling at Audrey.

"It's Audrey I'm most sorry for. Oh, Katharine, she's young, and has a—a royal right to brilliant and soft and splendid things around her. They belong to her. She is part of them. It usedn't to strike me like this, but it does now. She is very young for the battle of life, and so dainty and delicate and fine for—for the heat and the

dust and the strife, and yet of her own will, without a murmur—Audrey has told me nothing, nor has Andrew, but I know that Audrey never said one hard word in all this affair or thought one hard thought——"

Katharine's eyes were regaining their old ascendancy over her, and in self-defence Adeline shut hers.

"I know she hasn't," said she with the air of a diffident child turned mutinous all at once, "and of her own free will she has taken a great burthen on herself, and when Andrew lost his head, I'm afraid, Katharine, that he did, Audrey kept hers. Audrey will save us all, I believe, by her thought and her wisdom. Audrey has given us all that she has, things of which we have never suspected her, wisdom and guidance and strength and resolution. Audrey—who—who—was a child yesterday!" Katharine's eyes bored through the tremulous lids of her sister, and since Adeline had said all the essential things, she yielded tiredly to their importunate command.

Katharine never forgot her duty, so now, before uttering a syllable, she forced Adeline to drink a horrible concoction which always made her feel deadly sick, and in shaking up the pillows of the sufferer she also shook up her person.

Adeline felt shattered, but she bore up like an angel.

She was now the only angel of the quartette. In Audrey's mutable economy the spirit of evil was once more in full cry. She was enjoying herself in a new way. Even Adeline's mild little guesses at the truth, her generous praise which the moment before had bruised and wounded, and made her tremble, filled her now with freakish glee.

She was again the central figure in a horrible farce, a point of surprise in their silly existences little suspected, and as she watched Katharine shaking up Adeline, she could have twisted the life out of her. She sat straight up with sparkling eyes, and stiffened like a terrier for the fight.

"And now that you have experienced the result of exaggerated emotions, dear Adeline," said Katharine

freezingly, "I hope you will exert a little self-control and restrain yourself. You will remember the doctor's saying that serenity is your only hope."

Adeline made a noble though futile effort to cease from shaking, but the conserved energy of Katharine was always greater than she knew.

"I quite see that it is most kind of Audrey to try to make this most disastrous affair more palatable to us by putting it in, so to speak, a poetical form. She proposes, by what means I have yet to learn, to idealize and transform the most precarious, frequently the most sordid and grinding of all the professions, the scholastic one, into —an—er—exhilarating game. I have lived the life, in some degree successfully. I can therefore speak with authority. Audrey has seen it, its possibilities, and its issues merely in her imagination.

"Imagination can hardly alter facts. Possibly it is the absence in myself of the magic gift which makes it difficult for me to believe that fitness for the realities of life can, like a mushroom, be the growth of one night."

Curious little sounds of varying origin issued from the mouths of the three, and Katharine calmly proceeded:

"By an error of judgment on the part of Andrew, we are all practically penniless. Andrew, you never even mentioned your difficulties to me! I would so gladly have undertaken any drudgery in the matter. I am, thank God, broken in to drudgery! However, since you did not consult me, we must only accept the fact, and although deeply grateful for what Audrey proposes to do for us, I, for one, must decline to be a burthen on anyone."

"That is a hard way to put it, Katharine," said Andrew. "How many years was I a burthen upon you?"

"That was quite different. I had no other ruling interest in life, none of us had," she said generously. "You were the first always, you were our only hope, and our only aim."

"You sacrificed everything for me; you—none of you—had the health or the strength for constant work, and you

had enough to live on happily in a leisured life. You gave me everything—your health, and your strength, and your income—and one of you, alas! gave her life for me, without one regret. And I—may I not give anything back, Katharine? I owe you everything—we—I—Audrey and I are one in this, as you see, may we not pay you back even the paltry interest of all your principal?"

Katharine's lips thinned. Audrey playing with a rose, reminded her of the Roman Empire at its most corrupt period.

"I did my duty as my sisters did," she began.

"Other people have duties to do, too," said Audrey pertly, lifting the bull-terrier squirming at her feet for recognition into her lap to annoy Katharine, who hated the creature as she did Satan, but, remembering how infinitely more than Katharine was at stake, she dismissed him with a sympathetic murmur of "Rats!" and fixed her eyes on Katharine's Jäger shoes as being the least exasperating part of her person.

"I mean," she civilly resumed, "that now it's Andrew's turn to do his duty. You've had your chance, and you took it splendidly, and now the time's come for Andrew to take his."

The Jägers were pressing viciously into the turf.

"Nothing will induce me to look," thought Audrey; "but I'd give worlds to see her face."

"The result of Andrew's incursion into human affairs," said Audrey, "on his own account, is anything but lively for any of us. I also could have wished that he had consulted *me*. However, it's done, and we're all floundering in a hole.

"It's like the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' don't you think? and now the least that any of us can do for Andrew is to let him fish us out. If we get hurt scrambling out by ourselves, Andrew'd never forgive himself. He'd feel a beast to the day of his death; and if he didn't, he ought to." She ventured upon a glance. Katharine's face was

like stone. Audrey clasped her hands and let her lashes drop. "Although it would be the person who came between him and his duty who'd be the real beast."

"Have you finished, Audrey?" inquired Katharine with great self-control.

"Not quite, please, not for a little minute. If Andrew let anyone else interfere in this job he'd be despicable. Don't you see, Katharine, don't you see that this is Andrew's job, and no one else's, and can't you see the unfairness of cutting the ground from under his feet when he's just getting them firmly down on it? But that's nothing to trying to keep him as if he was a baby in arms, when he's six feet if he's an inch—it never struck me before, but he is." She chuckled in spite of herself. "Besides, he hasn't had a very amusing life. Why should he be deprived of the pleasure of delivering wise virgins from the slimy pit into which his own folly has dropped them?"

She turned her wicked eyes full upon Andrew. "He'll like being a proper, reasonable man for once, don't you see? and surely you'll admit it's quite time he began. It's not his fault that this is the first real chance he's ever had.

"Katharine, you've done a lot for Andrew, do this one more thing: give him his first chance!" she demanded audaciously, "and we'll all sit tight and just cheer him on."

There was an ominous silence, in which Audrey, being rather sorry for Andrew's face, smothered down the elf, and partially resumed the angel.

The Jäger shoes showed great activity; the prodigious amount of evil passion they ground into the innocent earth made her own sins seem less importunate, her own part in the situation more absorbingly soul-stirring. She would force Katharine into surrender in the end, but, meanwhile, she would play with her feelings a little. Katharine and her affairs were playing pretty recklessly with hers.

Then, if force failed, she could always resort to wheedle. She had no scruples and much courage. Adeline, growing quite bold, drew her glittering head more close. But for her dire sense of disaster in regard to Audrey, her strange recoil from some hidden stain in the child, the over-mastering desire to pierce further and behold some wonder of beauty which lay beneath it in depths that no stain had ever reached, she could have found a throbbing interest in the affair. It was so new, and urgent, and alive! A drama playing itself out under her very own eyes!

Katharine uttered a jerky cough.

"The moment a woman begins to think," she said in a careful voice, "she has once and for ever relinquished her proud privilege of sitting—er—tight—that, Audrey, is, I think, your term, whilst those she loves contend in the arena. Life for her has then ceased to be the spectacle of a summer's day. She also must descend to her own arena, and fight in her own way."

"And who's left to cheer the men who gain the crowns?" demanded Audrey.

"That part, I feel sure, you would perform to perfection, Audrey."

"Oh! I'll clap Andrew all right if I happen to be about. It's clapping a man wants, and generosity and trust, not that awful sort of unselfishness that's selfish to the core, and would rob him of all his glory just to add it to yours."

Katharine turned to Andrew, with an unmoved face.

"You and Audrey kindly suggest that we should move into the far lodge," she said. "It is very pretty, and very convenient, and I have always regretted that it should not be in the hands of gentle-people. I think it most kind of both of you to propose having it done up and the garden seen to. That was your thought, Audrey, I feel sure," she said with heroic generosity. "We will gladly accept your offer. We can put some of our furniture in, and I am sure you will keep the rest for us; I will then, at once, take measures for the reconstruction of my

school. My connection is excellent. I have no fear of not succeeding. In a very short time I hope to be in a position to reassume all my responsibilities."

Audrey's eyes were like lamps in a pool; her lips were parted; she sat immovable. By the curious insight which came to her in flashes she saw Katharine no longer a grim, impregnable obelisk of granite, but a weary woman, grown old before her time, embittered by disappointment, unmellowed by experience, unhallowed by love, marching magnificently to her death. She looked into the heart of Adeline, and it was bleeding.

And then she saw Adeline when things happened, and she had gone, and Katharine trampling down her anguish with her great Jäger shoes.

A frenzy of self-preservation took hold of Audrey. She slipped involuntarily to her knees. She clasped her hands, her words poured forth in a passionate stream. She forgot the horribleness of Katharine; the sight of her seemed actually to inspire her. She forgot every forbidding detail; she remembered only that people were not made to be stretched on crosses, and that Katharine's will must yield to hers.

The soft storm of words beat her to and fro as though she were a pebble tossed by the tide. She was an instrument true, keen and subtle in the hands of something not herself, and her words went home like darts.

But this was only for a moment. Too soon she was herself again, an earth-born sprite defying authority.

"You do understand," she said accusingly; "I can see you do. This is Andrew's chance, the chance of his life; you know it, and yet you can dare to stand in the way of it, to hurt and hamper him, and limit him and make him ashamed, and—and—take all the heart out of everything. Now, now, when every bone in your body is aching at the very thought of going back to the work you hate. You are—you're aching all over—I see you are! I always see pain! I—I wish I didn't! You must know that it will haunt Andrew. He'll never be great

or even a decent crammer with a millstone like that round his neck, and it's all just to score off him and me, and to bring every sin we ever committed home to us, and to be for ever sort of shaking your blood-curdling example before us like a Salvation Army flag. And can't you see the insolence of it to Andrew, and the cruelty to Adeline, and—and the horribleness to me? The only result of your wicked, wicked unselfishness, will be to make it utterly impossible for any single one of us ever to be happy again. And to kill yourself for that!"

She fairly knelt down before Katharine and there was infinite entreaty in her exquisite eyes.

"Have a little mercy, oh! Katharine, do! and let someone be a little happy. Have some mercy, and some common sense, and even you yourself might be a little happy, perhaps, for once, in your own way!"

CHAPTER XI

AND then the most extraordinary thing happened. All at once Katharine stood up, paused, sighed and yielded.

It was not Audrey kneeling amidst the daisies, a spectacle so profoundly soul-stirring to the other two observers, that conquered Katharine: far from it. A snake in the grass were, at any time, less repugnant to her feelings, and Audrey making a theatrical exhibition of herself was, she judged, a sight to make the angels weep.

It was the rapture of trustful assurance and love upon Andrew's quiet face that at last broke the unloved woman. She had given him everything but her pride to gain this crown of great glory, and she had lost in the game. And now she was so tired and sad, so riven with her miserable pain, that all there seemed left her to do was to hand in that also to the lost cause.

So she took her pride—the trusty sword that had so well served her—broke it, as it were, across her knees, and handed it, her whole heart going out in hate to the conqueror, to Andrew.

"I'll do as you both wish," she said slowly; "and now that the first act of this pitiful melodrama is at an end, had you not better sit on a chair, Audrey? Far be it from me to interfere in your scheme for the ideal life and the regeneration of Andrew. We'll go to the cottage, Adeline and I, and with what gratitude we may, accept your charity. I am too old, as you have so graphically demonstrated to me, to contend with modern youth, and

the new ideal of life; but I am still young enough to watch how youth founded upon ignorance and egoism, and ideals fashioned from iridescent bubbles, will replace the dull old order."

Her words were clear and serene. She sat erect and stately, her strong hands evenly stroking the pages of a book, but the still look of renunciation in Katharine's face frightened Audrey out of her wits. Her bitter words she simply brushed aside; they were just Katharine; but the look—the look! That represented to the girl—vaguely, hauntingly, yet inconceivably conscious of her hidden stain, and, at the same time, straining every nerve to deepen and make it indelible—the lost causes of all the righteous.

"And if the righteous look like that when they have to give in in the end, what about the wicked, even when they win? Perhaps their lost causes are hell, the real thing, where they pinch your flesh with hot irons."

Of a sudden she felt physically sick, so bitterly clear was her realization of the pain without hope that hurts the flesh. Her senses never failed Audrey.

"But this won't do," she said, bracing up; "and Katharine's the most discouraging person I know. Associating with her ought to be eternal punishment enough for anyone."

Audrey could not shake off this horrible impression, however. When she picked herself up from her knees, and stood before Katharine, her audacity had slipped away, her passion was quenched, her crisp clothes hung limp about her undeveloped shoulders. She was a forlorn child in the blighting shadow of the Law.

"I wonder if you'd hate me less, Katharine," she said, "if I were a real proper prodigal in awful clothes, eating husks in the wilderness?" There was a perfectly genuine sob in her throat.

"My dear Audrey, I must again beg of you to compose yourself," said Katharine with superb scorn. "Your perfect health, I should have thought, would have pre-

served you at least from hysteria, your singularly acute business instinct from exaggeration. Pray permit me to pass. All this has been too much for you, Adeline. Andrew, hand me those drops, please."

Adeline's whole body rose in revolt against the drops and Katharine. She wanted to get hold of Audrey's hand, to gather strength from its freshness, and then spend it in confused prayer for the girl's sin, and crystal clear hope for her salvation; but Katharine, in her present mood, would have quelled an archangel into obedience.

Adeline swallowed the drops, and all the hope in her heart slipped out. No effort is lost, however. The mood of Katharine corrected that of Audrey, who was herself again. The audacity in her regal retreat was impressive.

Directly she was out of the line of Katharine's vision she relaxed both in face and form. "It's Katharine who's made her feel bad," she said loftily, "and not me. Katharine's exactly like Katharine of Russia, without her saving immorality, and that's no fault of hers—it's just from early education and from an impious desire to be an example to you. I don't think it was ever necessary, Andrew; some people seem to be born good. What spoilt her eagle flight was being cramped into a school-room messing about with a few little flabby brains, when she should have been marching through rivers of blood to found empires. Nothing but a spacious life could ever have organized the colossal energies of Katharine and taught her to laugh and leave Adeline alone. She should have been you, Andrew, and have married me."

"I'm extremely thankful she didn't. My dearest child, if you think for two consecutive moments you will forgive Katharine, for you'll understand how much it costs her to give up, to stand aside, to be conquered, after all these years, by a little foolish child so full of infinite wisdom."

"Andrew! don't," she cried. "You haven't the right. You, to speak like that, when you know so little of me as to think I don't know what all this means to Katharine, that I don't feel every bit of it inside me more than

Katharine does. She's constructed of the best steel; she's not soft and flabby inside her, like other people. I loathe victories at such a price, and then," she said miserably, "to be hated in that awful steel-clad way for having won. When people are past their play and the time for other people's has come, they ought to see it and retire in good order. I wonder what her stony eyes saw when she watched the girls at their games. I daresay it was their poor little souls playing about in hell. She'd see anything—Katharine!"

"My poor little darling!"

"And all this for doing my duty," she wailed. "Suppose I did anything but my duty—the exact opposite, in fact—I wonder now just what the Antrobus family would say?"

She fetched up short to look at Andrew, and the finger on her lips trembled a little. He looked impossible.

One morning, a few weeks ago, in searching for some little truth, he had found it, and, at the same time, had found himself once again sheer up against that self-erected barrier which divides the minds of men from the source of all truth, so that the wisest are still but as sparrows picking up the crumbs from the master's table.

He had been battering his head most of the preceding night against the great gates of brass, and now, between the blows and being again baffled, his head ached, and his heart was as water within him, and yet as ever the fierce desire to storm the jealous barrier and fight his way in and know took hold of Andrew, for to know was the passion of his life.

His tactics, however, were not as yet equal to the assault, and he now sat idle, bewailing his defeat; so, as he was greatly interested in the progress towards materialization, then almost completed, of a newt, he dropped speculation, put his tiny instruments in order, and began his patient, breathless investigations. The little procession of changes went on under his absorbed eyes as it had done from the beginning, each innermost

detail, moment by moment, fitting in inflexibly to the inflexible purpose. Mysterious fingers more delicate than air touched and moulded the little head; the backbone was pressed into shape as by a thought; new characteristics came out into the light as by magic, and all the time little foolish fancies were stirring in Andrew's big mind—little enough to be sure and held down tight, but for all that they pressed so hard upon him that he left the ordered progress of the newt to the safe guardianship of the law within him, and went up the steps and out into the garden. To lie awake at nights fighting windmills takes all a man's strength, and this last had been a long business. He was tired and dazed, and not quite accountable, perhaps, for his vagrant imagination.

For all at once it seemed to him as though the brazen gates had fallen as suddenly and noiselessly and irrationally as ever the walls of Jericho did, and the source of all things and of all truth lay discovered to the eyes of man. Nothing definitely differentiated or fixed. But there in infinite, ineffable, beneficent abundance above him and about him and within him lay everything, the whole waiting only for the eye to see and the hand to handle.

But there fell a blindness upon the eyes of Andrew an impotence upon his hands. He stood a bewildered scientist, in doubt about his sanity, not to say his soul. Then his eyes alighted upon a hedge of sweet-peas, their little hearts afire with the summer, and he wondered at the extraordinary things they fell to telling him. He had never before paused to listen to the secrets of the flowers: he had torn them out of their little insides with instruments; but now his benumbed brain being equal to nothing else, it listened at their silver ears. The poise of their heads, so light and proud and elegant, reminded him of Audrey, and *her* heart also was afire with the summer.

That swift, irrational, irresponsible fall of the gates, and the subsequent blindness, had certainly greatly upset Andrew, for now he looked with a new wonder at all

the flowers. He awoke at last to find himself calling them aloud in the full sunshine by the generic term of the "little thoughts of God."

It was a momentary weakness. He laughed at his own folly, and lo! the gates stood up again in brazen defiance, and he forgot his sentimental definition. But Audrey, standing now before him, brought it to his memory. His eyes behind the pince-nez grew dreamy.

"You're like a flower," he said; "a sweet-pea, I think, and so in common with all the flowers you're one of the 'little thoughts of God.'"

Audrey gasped. Andrew looked at her more closely.

"But, Audrey, your eyes are sad. They're the saddest eyes I've ever seen. I wonder why?"

He frowned in the baffled way he had done when the brazen gates defied him.

Audrey flounced round again to his side.

"Let us go home," she said. "You haven't been listening to one word, not one! Talk of the inconsequence of the frivolous! You're complicating everything by growing—er—extraordinary at the wrong moment. It's just like you, Andrew.

"Besides, I thought you didn't believe in God?" She narrowed her eyes to observe him. "I've been glad sometimes you didn't," she said thoughtfully. "He'd probably have been the God of the Antrobuses, and have made you afraid to rest, or enjoy yourself, or let anyone else do it. You're getting very uncomfortable, Andrew, and it's all so curious, when there's such a heap to do and we're still up to our necks in the hole, and it's so awfully necessary that you should keep your head."

"My dearest child!" He looked hopelessly puzzled.

"Look here, Andrew! I'm not such a fool as I look, really. I have read a lot of your literature, and I happen to know that when people who've spent years trying to root God out of the universe, for the good of science, turn round suddenly and try to switch Him back into it for their own selfish comfort, that it often affects their

brain. They have the most harrowing time, and so's everyone else, and unless they land in a lunatic asylum, they turn Plymouth Brethren and preach."

Andrew was still puzzled and anxious, but he laughed.

"How dare you," said Audrey, "to laugh, in the most serious crisis of our lives! But no one can do more than one thing well at a time. Couldn't you put through this present project first, and then start on the other trail?"

"My dear child, I have no notion of taking any transcendental flight, either now or later."

"I wonder if you haven't really?" she said in a slightly disappointed voice, and her glance grew rather motherly. She had so much to protect, to arrange for, and to provide against. She must be very careful and let no opportunity slip.

"However," she said, "I'm not at all sure that it mightn't distract your mind, make a—a pleasant variety afterwards—later on, I mean."

Andrew laughed, for him vociferously.

This new and intimate companionship with Audrey deeply stirred and amused him. The sweet vitality she was giving out in her eager fixed resolve to defy everything, and despite all hindrance, to live at full pitch for the rest of her own days, and yet make everything tolerably comfortable for everyone else, was a revelation to Andrew, a quickening. It was the first time she had ever lived her pure and most precious life in the presence of her husband, and the effect was singularly inspiring. Until now he had seen women as through a glass darkly. This was the Vision Beautiful to Andrew. The richness of it, the multiplicity, the fragrance, and, above all, the sweet inconsequence, and the melody that called out all his tenderness! The sadness in the young eyes unloosed hidden springs of strength and reverence. The sap of youth welled up in Andrew. At this moment his heart and his years came very near together.

He laughed like a boy.

"Don't be afraid, little Flower of Theology. It's only when I see you that I believe in God. The rest of the time," he added, with a pang of unaccountable sorrow, "I'm looking, I think honestly, for a First Cause."

For some inexplicable reason Audrey came nearer to Andrew.

"I don't like that name. It sounds like Katharine."

"There is an elusive difference between the two," he said with an odd sigh.

"First Cause would be an awful sort of person if you got into a tight place. He's only fit for books, I think. When—this—is over, Andrew, if I were you, I'd look for the other—the real God—and leave First Cause where he is. It would fill up your time more completely. And, Andrew, I'd better tell you at once you'll never find God by looking at me."

She fetched up beside a little stagnant backwater of the stream.

"Oh, do you know, there's a brood of late tadpoles here? I forgot to tell you. They were jelly a week ago, and now they're enjoying life."

She poked the point of her sunshade in amongst the scurrying crowd.

The lateness of the creatures' appearance upon this mortal sphere greatly interested Andrew. He examined and speculated with hearty content.

"You know a great deal more of tadpoles than ever you could know of me," said his wife. "You're much more at home with them. I advise you to look for God in the tadpoles; if you looked long enough you might find Him—the real one, you know."

Her eyes began to shine in their curious, sudden way. "I'm sure you would," she said. "I get quite sure of things quite suddenly sometimes." Her cheeks were flushing, her eyes aflame.

"And then with the cramming-shop going like anything, and Katharine a mile and a half away, and your greatness coming nearer every day—so near that you can

almost touch it—oh, Andrew! you'll have no end of a good time!"

"And you'll be the giver of all the gifts, you amazing child," he said; "perhaps even the giver of God," he added slowly, with the saddest smile. "In all things you must always be my inspiration." He watched her and the tadpoles by turns.

"I decline the tadpoles as a link to the Infinite, with you at hand, Audrey," he said, standing up. "On the whole, I quite agree with you in thinking that I shall have no end of a good time!

"The most disastrous night of my life," said he, as they walked on, "has become the dawn of such a day as I had never dared to expect, and it is you, dear, who has brought in the morning."

"Oh, Andrew!" she said hopelessly. "If you'd only take my advice and not bother about me!"

She walked on listlessly, swinging her hat, and said no more.

CHAPTER XII

AUDREY now worked as hard to get her own will, as many a worthy saint has done to forego his. In some regards she practised a self-denial as austere. She permitted herself no longer to think—except for others; she kept her eyes upon high matters, and refused to behold iniquity either in herself or in Katharine. She poured forth her passionate heart to Larry every day—in short sentences, sometimes in crisp ones, and all the time she worked so valiantly for the undoing of his life she was unfolding a mother's heart for Andrew. It grew, it grew. In the most destructive and diabolical way it grew. It confounded reason, contraverted experience. At such break-neck speed did it expand that the hard little green bud of a thing which once was Audrey's heart, and had so bitterly protested against the most diffident intrusion of Andrew, was now full of him and his concerns. They hampered her, and were beyond words perplexing and terrifying, but now she could forgive Andrew for the inconvenience he caused, as a mother can forgive her son. His attitude towards her was incomprehensible, and singularly wanting in common sense, but she felt sure that he would know better in time.

With the sheer audacity of the faith inseparable from motherhood, she could see Andrew, in all his crude imperfection, his amazing helplessness, that which in the mellowing and chastening hand of time he would yet become. She began to take a mystic pride in Andrew as potentially completed man.

There were occasions, of course, upon which he made her feel dreadful, and then she put him in his right place;

that of an inexorable stepping-stone to success, by writing unflinchingly firm letters to friends demanding pupils, and generally getting them.

The natural woman is in a chronic state of revolt against the instructor of her son; his misrepresentations touch her to the quick, and rob her of some vague right in her own blood and bone which yet is sacred, and once filched from woman by man can never be given back to her. They have no prophetic vision, tutors, and can only see where mothers know.

Every woman living, directly her own man child is born into the world, goes out on the eternal search for the perfect being, the Two in One, to look after him, and many are foolish enough when the time comes to expect to find this goal of creation concealed in the person of a tutor. That is why she has no scruple whatsoever in changing, at the shortest notice, one Temple which has belied faith, hope, and charity, for another whose yet unopened depths may cherish these graces.

Audrey was quite aware of this wide-spreading feminine ideal, and was herself fairly inspired with it, and all the circumstances were propitious. Andrew's character and attainments were widely known. His gift for teaching had been a bye-word at his college, his position was sound. The house was well-drained, on gravel soil, and *an hour and a half* from London. This was beautifully set forth in the prospectus by Audrey. Saturday to Monday leave was strictly denied unless either of his parents or a well-authenticated substitute should appear in person to claim the applicant, and return him in safety to the fold.

Even her worst enemy felt assured that, knowing as much as Audrey Antrobus did about man, her first care would be to feed him, and if the lads did fall in love with her, she was safer in the end, less expensive and more developing to good manners, than the housemaid, or the portionless daughters of the Vicar.

Mr. Antrobus's Army House was an establishment

for which the soul of many a mother had often yearned. Promises came pouring in, and working at such a rate, Audrey was so tired at night that she slept like a baby, and arose fresh as the morning.

And now, having finished for the moment with Andrew's part, she turned her attention to the domestic changes the project made necessary, and lo! she was brought face to face with Andrew and his needs in even a more poignant fashion. Instead of becoming obliterated in some degree, as she had confidently expected, his consequence grew. He seemed to want her in a more insistent, intimate way than ever. In no department could you wash your hands of Andrew! When you have to think of the nourishment peculiarly necessary to the especial man with whom you deal, it, so to speak, insulates him from all others around you.

She was attaching Andrew to herself by bonds, small indeed, but unbreakable, and doing him a grievous wrong, emphasizing, instead of lessening, the helplessness of Andrew, increasing his dependence upon herself.

In order to grow to the full stature of a man, Andrew must be self-dependent, and to make him so must from henceforth be her ruling aim. This was now the problem that lay between her and success. It was a problem of monumental proportions. Sometimes she felt too young for the task, too lacking in experience. She could not have conceived the possibility of Andrew's spreading himself in this way, or of her bearing it with the divine patience she did. He had indeed become an octopus—of unknown dimensions and dumb and dogged movements, and was getting mixed in with all she did. He seemed to be pulling her with insidious tentacles into some hidden snare.

Some of this clotted emotion cried itself out in her letters to Larry, and Larry, who had plumbed depths in Audrey that no other line had ever reached, grew desperate as he read. He had not one doubt as to her love, but he had many in regard to a queer strain in the girl

that more than once had confounded all his calculations. His own code of morality may have been that of a world still in its early youth, but there was no indefiniteness in it. It stood out clear-cut and sharp in his mind, and he meant, as a matter of course, to abide by it. He had already stood the test of the Day Afterwards, that day of retribution which always overtakes the man who must, by force of something not himself, even sin like a gentleman. He had not flinched, and had not been found wanting. He had been ready to sacrifice the thing he held dearest, his career, for Audrey, and now that the chance of his life had given that back, his one consuming desire was to do the right thing by her, to make smooth her path and assure her future position before he left England.

Larry had never wanted anything better than to be a soldier. He could not have conceived any finer future for any man, be he prince or swineherd. The very thought of having to leave his regiment with no professional future more enterprising than that of a colonel of Yeomanry, had twisted his heart-strings. But it was only in the moment of his reprieve that the Vision Splendid which alone makes the great soldier rose up before Larry and wrote itself in the ink that does not fade into the warp and woof of the careless boy.

In every atom of the stuff of him he was now a soldier, and to do quickly and in the best way what had to be done was part and parcel of Larry. In the exaltation of his supreme triumph over fate he saw clear. He knew that the war was upon the land and that therein lay his chance. The Lion might doze, and doubt, and sit tight, but Larry knew from the beginning—to him it was as sure as God. Of the future he had no doubt. He had his chance now, which would square a lot.

And for the rest—the world is an institution that can be got at. An historic name does something, but the way of a man with a woman does more; and Audrey was Audrey, and if between them they could not win back the smile to wried mouths, and reawaken in unseeing

eyes the recognition that brings absolution of sin, it would be indeed a strange thing. Of the future he had no fear! It was the present that threw him. The wrong that he had done must be righted, and time was everything. The month was running out, and Audrey seemed no nearer the end of her task than she was when it began. So he wrote a letter to her that, in an instant, made her face grey and sucked out all her strength. She crept to the sofa and lay down.

It was eleven o'clock, and she had already had a triumphant morning. Finding herself suddenly up against a serious difficulty, she had left her preparations, and as a means of grace flown hot-foot to Katharine, concentrating all her energies into seeing the best in her. As a hair-shirt Katharine was becoming invaluable; Audrey could now wear her without moving a muscle, and even Katharine was beginning to watch Audrey with some human amusement, and permitting her to do all the disagreeable things without audible protest.

She had come home quite refreshed; a solution to the last difficulty had flashed upon her as she crossed the brook, and now the cold, awful truth in Larry's desperate letter pierced her like an arrow. Her wings fluttered wildly against the cruel bars of the cage she had herself so cunningly devised. Her heart fought blindly against its own leading. She curled herself into a little knot on the great sofa, and held in the cries that tore her throat; she fought with all her might for self-control, but she could not quiet thought, or curb the imagination maddened from restraint.

She saw, as in a mirror, the Palace of Harmony she had built up for those others with all her treasures, and lo! it was a sepulchre to hold her sin, and the sepulchre crumbled and fell, and all the things she wished to consecrate and the creatures she designed to protect, were crushed in the ruins; all except her sin. That alone endured; it arose from amidst the chaos and followed her whithersoever she went. She shut her staring eyes

to blot out the vision, only to see things more prosaic but not less hideous.

The scheme for the salvation of these helpless, hopeless people was hers. She was its life; without her it would inevitably die of inanition and—and in spite of all her wisdom, and all Andrew's promises, they would find out, these women—Katharine, by the help of all the devils she worshipped; Adeline, by some magic more awful still—and without one gleam of gratitude for all her self-sacrifice, fling back her sinful money in her face. Oh! well she knew Christians!

She tried to reason, to argue, to have things out with herself, to clarify her outlook. She could see nothing but Adeline shrunk together crying, when she had just learnt to laugh at last, and forgotten to prepare for death. Katharine was less distinct but more alarming. She was doubtless dying of hard work; and Andrew, paralysed and broken, he groped blindly with his dead eyes amongst his bottles.

By giving life to all the wretched crowd, she had, it was plain, cut her own throat.

She sat up and beat off despair. She would win! She would win! Something would turn up. Something have mercy, somewhere! After all she'd done and suffered and given up, she couldn't give in now, throw up what was going to be a great enterprise—not now, things had gone too far. She was too indispensable. It was part of her, she could not leave it; she couldn't desert them, those unfortunate creatures, or her post. She'd never been mean—never! She couldn't begin now. But neither could she write to Larry or be alone any longer in this horror of pain.

She sprang from the sofa, washed her face with trembling hands, put Larry's letter near her heart for consolation, and fled to Andrew in the laboratory.

Like many another, Audrey was the helpless victim of racial and climatic conditions. She could have been supremely moral as a bigamist.

CHAPTER XIII

ANDREW was nervously staring at a telegram. The volcanic eruption of his wife was plainly a relief, but he spoke dejectedly.

"I have always been glad I didn't happen to be a woman and have to interview housemaids. What short-sighted mortals we are!" he sighed. "I had rather interview an army of housemaids than one Senior Wrangler. Look, Audrey! This is the first reply to our advertisement. He may be here now at any moment. I wish," he added mildly, "that the devil would take him!"

"He'll not, then. Special providences like that never happen. And he's pretty poor, too," she mused, fluttering the telegram, "or he wouldn't have answered in such a hurry, and set out all his qualifications for the job. Housemaids aren't in it with this. Housemaids can always get situations; it's the situations that can't get housemaids: but it's another story with Wranglers. They don't suit every place."

Andrew sighed. Here was a shadow upon his path that even Audrey could not lighten!

"I have been reading about Wranglers lately," she said, sitting down, "and so far as I can understand, they seem to be incapable of dealing with anything less monumental than a Wrangler's brain. Do you think they're quite the thing for a cramming place?"

Andrew started and stared.

"You can't empty an ocean into a pint pot, and that's what Wranglers would be sure to be after."

"Audrey, what have you been reading?"

"An extremely interesting book. How pedantic you are! Just because I melt down knowledge into common sense you think I'm light-minded. I hate scientific jargon! And you're dreadfully weak, Andrew. If this Wrangler happens to be Learning in adversity, as I fear he is from his indecent haste—he must have sat up all night to catch the early worm in the morning papers—the boys won't be in it with you—that is, of course, provided his conversation stimulates your own mental powers. You'll engage him straight off just because it would hurt you too much not to do so, besides being a slur on scholarship."

"My dearest Audrey, I have a conscience."

"You have, poor Andrew, a scholar's conscience. It's a beautiful and delicate instrument," she sighed, "unsuited to a world full of jars."

"But, my dear child, if the man knows enough to stimulate my brain, he'll surely suffice for those of lads from the public schools."

"Don't you think public schools are places where brains pick up a good deal of rubbish and get into the way of being stimulated in the wrong places?"

"I hope not, dear."

"So do I, but one must admit facts. I know so many boys, and I do think public schools have a genius for antagonizing the smaller sort of brains. A Senior Wrangler who must have sucked in knowledge with his great organ just because he had to, could hardly be expected to realize the existence of organs that actively resist the intrusion of light and knowledge at all into their rubbish-holes. It is the man who knows the things that fill their queer brains and can turn them out and put his own stuff in, who'll get the boys into Sandhurst."

She seemed interested in the subject, and Andrew was interested in her. So she had the field to herself.

"The man who is master of his subject forgets so often that he was once its slave, or that if he wasn't, he was the exception, not the rule."

"The greatest intellects are frequently the most simple, dear."

"But that's just it. It's not simplicity a boy wants; it's artfulness, and a creature who's turned himself into a great sponge for the absorption of learning could never be expected to be all day tracking a boy's little atom of a sponge to its lair or teaching it to suck. He'd be too dazzled in the radiance of his own illuminated brain to see a wink in the semi-darkness of other people's. He'd always be teaching and developing the only self he knows, and that's himself. I have my doubts about Wranglers, as applied to the wobbly brain of anybody."

"There's a glimmer of truth in your observations, perhaps."

"I've known two high-up Wranglers," said Audrey. "One tried to lower himself to my level—he told me that, in spite of the evidence of his five senses, he believed that I possessed an intellect, and recommended me to go to Girton. The other tried to be funny. I don't know which was the least conducive to *my* mental development."

"But, darling child, I'm a Wrangler."

"As if I ever forget that! It's only right that you should be a Wrangler—and all the other things as well; it confers dignity on the establishment. It's a distinct asset, a Wrangler in the house is quite indispensable. And, besides," she said, forgetting more important matters in her absorption in her scheme—once Audrey got thoroughly absorbed in one thing, she forgot the rest—"besides, you'll be safe enough. I'll know every boy down to the ground in a week, and I can tell you just how to get at him. Of course, I only mean the idiotic part that you couldn't possibly know anything about, without natural inward fellowship, or years of patient excavation."

"There may be something in that," said Andrew, with keen enjoyment.

Andrew felt that he was, indeed, beginning to know his

wife. She looked at him and started. Her cheeks grew scarlet, her jaw dropped.

"Oh, Andrew, I didn't mean that altogether! Once the thing is started I shouldn't dream of interfering. I—I respect you too much, and I hate interfering women. Only it is so important to get this thing started on the right lines, you know, and then it will live simply on its own merits, and you, with your great sponge of a brain, once you pick up a few practical suggestions, will be sucking in knowledge every hour. The boys will be teaching you, don't you see? Oh, the thing'll go! All it wants is a push-off! I simply want you to explain boys to yourself by—well, say by *me*, and to get you now—this minute—to think first of the boys and afterwards of the Wrangler; not on any account to let him get uppermost in your mind. Once he is," she said with decision, "he'll stay there and crush the boys to powder. Oh! Andrew, he will! It will be the elephant all over again! Dear me! Andrew, if you'd sat out as many dances as I have with boys, you'd have some idea how to set about blotting out their ignorance with your knowledge, and making the painful process a rose-strewn path to the creatures. It's nothing but intimate experience can do this, I can tell you."

"But, dearest, I fear I cannot make it a rule of sitting out dances with my pupils!"

"No, worse luck! If you'd sat out more of them with girls in an understanding way, it would have done just as well. By losing all your opportunities, Andrew, you've laid a pretty heavy burthen on me, I'd wish you to know. There's another thing. Two Wranglers would be sure to have conflicting opinions on most subjects that by the nature of them would have to be threshed out at meals, and in clarifying your own brains you'd muddle those of the boys, besides ruining your digestions—and now, Andrew, you mustn't forget for one minute that once I've pushed you off, I've washed my hands of the whole business."

"Except to be the life and soul of it, beloved. Every day I know you better, and regret more keenly my imbecility in having waited so long for the knowledge. I have practically lost three years of you. That hurts, little girl."

"You know nothing of me, and you never will, whatever happens. Do stick to your chores, Andrew. Goodness! here he is—walking—and he's mopping his face. I felt in my bones he was poor, and sure to complicate things. Why couldn't he drive and arrive cool? I'm so glad I ordered sweetbreads for luncheon; and if you can, do, for goodness' sake! pay his fare. You won't hurt his feelings—you'll get so red. Even with butlers you blush like a rose—and Wranglers! Andrew, but it's awful! A crammer's life isn't all beer and skittles, anyway. Make things as nice as you can; but, Andrew, think first of the boys—first, first, first!" she hissed. "I—I simply must see that man at the first plunge—I'd know him in one minute! And you can't settle anything definite until after luncheon."

She flung a glance round the room.

"I say! I'll just stand behind this screen and creep out quietly. I'll open the door one atom ready for the retreat."

"Audrey! for Heaven's sake, don't!" pleaded the wretched man.

The coming interview presented a bewildering array of difficulties to this alien upon earth, and the little glimmers of sense and sound understanding in Audrey's engaging prattle had not tended to allay his apprehensions. The sense of responsibility was new in him, and he handled it clumsily. His own shortcomings drilled into him by circumstances and their high priest, Katharine, had only partially yielded to the less strenuous methods of his wife. He knew little of the boy whose intuition is to idle; a Senior Wrangler looking for a menial post moved him to his depths; and Audrey, behind the screen listening with all her ears, was the last straw.

"Audrey! Go! For God's sake, go, my dearest! You still have time."

"I haven't. I hear him on the stairs, and you ought to be glad to have me so near. Other people would be glad enough, I can tell you! Andrew!—at least *look* calm!"

How gladly would he have followed her counsel of perfection, but Andrew, in his own way, was human also.

Audrey had never believed that duty could be so enjoyable. She was wholly happy, and the pucker in Andrew's brow suited him. It was just what he wanted to make him quite alive.

Mrs. Antrobus breathlessly waited. Her intuition had led her, as usual, to within an appreciable distance of the truth. Mr. Frazer was poor, and about as unfitted to the training of the dawning mind as a man well could be. He was unworldly, also awkward, humble, but not in regard to his own capacity—far from it. He had an honest appreciation of the instrument with which, when perfectly at his command, he meant to achieve mighty aims. His passion for the quest of knowledge was a consuming fire; to acquire facts and deduce arguments the breath of his nostrils.

It was of Henry Frazer as mere man of whom he was doubtful. He had never been a boy, and knew but little of the species, and the little that he did know had steeped him in pessimism! Boys were at best a hideous and eternal necessity, the tuition of nine-tenths of them a hopeless task; but if he, who had accomplished what he had in himself, could not deal with their rubbishy brains as well as another, it were indeed strange.

He was poor, it is true, but the precipitancy in his present enterprise was less in order to feed and clothe himself, and so take the burthen off his parents, and get away from an overflowing family, than an overwhelming desire to come face to face with a man of Andrew's standing, and

by hook or by crook to live in his presence and learn at his feet.

In less than five minutes Audrey had sized him down. She was twittering with sympathy for both the men and shaking with apprehension. She had, to be sure, full cause to be.

The three sentences he jerked out bore the hall-mark of good breeding; his clothes, if old, fitted; he was carefully shaven; his voice had the right tone; more than all, his countenance was good—in an aloof, ineffective way.

As a man he was as deeply detrimental as Andrew himself. He was everything he ought to be, but the one thing needful. In two minutes he and Andrew had drawn one another into a discussion and both forgotten the occasion. They were at it hammer and tongs. Jaw-breaking horrors of speech slid nimbly off their tongues. They reverberated in the brain of Audrey.

Her courage remained steady, however. The very extent and variety of the pitfalls from which she had to protect Andrew and his potential victims, gave tone to her moral fibre. The conversation swung forward on its mighty wheels, the original idea receding steadily into the misty margins of the scholars' consciousness.

The potential energies of the young tutor were, she could see, inconceivable; he was a bombshell in the path of Mrs. Antrobus, and seemed likely to remain so. The one would form a mortal temptation to the other, to which he would invariably gaily yield; they would hopelessly domoralize each other. The scheme for which she was renouncing the best in life was doomed!

At the same time she paused to give them one more chance, and the more she looked at the young man the better she liked him, the more did she discern of his possible usefulness in certain future contingencies. As a disciple upon his own hearthstone, he would form a sort of improvised anchor for Andrew to hold on to until things righted themselves, and he grappled that which Destiny had in store for him.

For such use he seemed nothing less than a Heaven-sent boon. But the boys!—the shop! The boys would run riot; the shop be shut up after the first term!

She listened with pensive deliberation as spirits mixed, and followed whithersoever they led. She rushed with them from argument to argument; her native wits carried her over every difficulty like a bird. She paused when they did to review matters, to pick up some point of union, emphasize some difference. She paced with them upon some common ground where for a moment they could dwell at peace, then start asunder again to fly at each other's throats and slaughter and slay.

As in their gentle scholarly voices they reviled one another, she would silently chuckle. Sometimes Andrew looked like an inspired prophet, but much more frequently like the Prince of Darkness. Never before had she been so proud of Andrew. It was a most exhilarating discussion. Duty took on new values.

At the same time, since it was the only conversation in her life in which Audrey had only taken a passive part, she became a little restless in her enforced seclusion. She longed to clap and cheer them, but in no sort of way did she permit her personal emotion to interfere with the intrinsic serenity of her procedure.

The existing impossibility of the man was as patent as his potential invaluability. He must go!

But it was not until the two pince-nez, and the noses that supported them, met in final accord over one green jar that she decided that the time for Andrew's moral effort had come.

She looked cautiously round the edge of the screen; the man's back happily was turned to her, and she concluded with some slight disdain that his absorption would be greater than her attraction, but Andrew was another thing. Him she fixed in an hypnotic stare, and at last, with a painful effort, the wretched man turned to focus his gaze upon the disintegrating spectacle of Audrey, saying "No!" after a fashion that no man could dis-

regard. She was a fiery image of negation, and brought home his contemplated sin to his anguished soul.

Her ridiculous eyes were wet, and that was why Andrew knew that she was right and he must turn from his door the visiting angel. It was, perhaps, the most desolating moment in Andrew's whole life.

Audrey stole away, feeling as though she had been ill-treating two babies, but knowing the calming power of common sense and food upon any distracting passion, she rang the bell to hurry in luncheon. When the men, still throbbing with their last subject, joined her, she was standing at the open window contemplating two peacocks strutting in the sun. The artless grace with which she turned to greet her guest slightly disturbed Mr. Frazer. He flung a hasty glance at Andrew; he had not been prepared for this sort of thing. So very young a person! Any wife must be a brake upon the strenuous life, but this! He felt sorry for Antrobus. He was irresistibly drawn to the man. He wondered if they had children, and if so, if they were of any biological value to their father. He hoped they did not suffer from any of the more explosive complaints of infancy. He himself was the eldest of eleven, and his mother—a good, stalwart woman without bowels—would break in upon his most important work to send him running for the doctor. With how many a domestic earthquake had the small house reverberated, and no one in the end any the worse for it but himself! It was one of his reasons for becoming a tutor.

By this time he was keenly sorry for Antrobus, and made his final decision for celibacy.

"If only you'd telegraphed," said Audrey, "we could have sent for you." He was absently swallowing his soup.

"Thank you; but I enjoyed the walk. One *must* have exercise."

"He never looked at anything," thought Audrey; "and that's the person who proposes to get the best out

of boys." He was now helping himself in a vacant way to sweetbreads.

"Oh, Mr. Frazer, do take some sauce!"

He glanced indifferently at his dry plate.

"I've taken some, thank you."

"It's a lovely walk from the station," she adventured.

"Yes," he said nervously. The worst of women was that they always made you tell lies.

"And yet, if he only gave his senses a chance," she thought, "he'd be very much like other people. I wish I'd had him sooner, or that there was more time."

"This is rather a nice place for boys, don't you think?" she sweetly inquired.

"Indeed, yes! They're lucky to have the chance of such a laboratory. The last place I was at they used a back kitchen from which every domestic sound was audible. You propose, Mr. Antrobus, to take science yourself? If you permit the fellows free access to your laboratory, you will, I fear, be throwing pearls before swine."

Andrew looked dubious.

"But I was thinking of the country, you know," said Audrey, "and being four miles from a station and a nice distance from town."

He ripped his mind from Andrew, and turned upon her a dull, inattentive eye.

"That sort of fellow—the fellow, I mean, who won't work except under compulsion—doesn't concern himself with the country, Mrs. Antrobus. He likes a street to loaf in—a shop, for choice a gun-shop, to flatten his nose against, and he probably only takes the trouble to do that because the other fellows do it." He paused to bolt the rest of the food on his plate, with a dim idea of hurrying up the meal and getting rid of her.

"But he can surely do more active mischief than that?" pleaded Audrey.

"Well, yes," he said heavily. "He can stare at girls. I have, however, watched him at it, and found that it

was done, as in the case of the guns, in a perfunctory way, without any serious conviction. As with the gun-shop, it is a purely mechanical and uninterested process."

There was a slight pause. Andrew, who was conscientiously anxious to pick up hints as to the details in his proposed undertaking, looked pensive.

Mr. Frazer wondered if he had been indiscreet. It was, indeed, something in the face of Mrs. Antrobus herself which had recalled to him certain investigations into the workings of a boy's mind, in which he had once dabbled. He felt embarrassed, but not self-conscious.

In his own person he had never believed himself to be the least interesting to women; he took, therefore, but little interest in women. The pause, however, seemed in some cryptic way to await *his* breaking.

"I have noticed," he said, "that they do take some interest of a vital nature in their ties. It is frequently the cause of their being late for work." He spoke with no virulence. His feeling for or against the species was a passive one. In common with women, the place in Nature of the boy was to perfect man in the practice of self-control and a rapid readjustment of jarred mental mechanism.

Mrs. Antrobus helped him to a cutlet. Had she permitted him a free hand he would undoubtedly have forgotten the peas.

"I'm afraid your investigations were too purely scientific," she said, "to be entirely sympathetic. Perhaps you don't quite do justice to the boys. The stare, won't you admit, was rather tentative than perfunctory. —Andrew, have some gravy, do!—They're so young," she pleaded, "and one must practice before one is perfect even in the simplest things in life. And to have to stare in groups, as he always does, must surely handicap a poor beginner of a boy. I've always been rather sorry for crammers' boys trying their powers, each more or less an object of derision to all the others, and the whole lot directly the girl looks as if she was aware of their presence,

wishing that the ground would open and swallow them. I've often longed to show them the right way to qualify. It's as pathetic as young cocks learning to crow. Don't you think that both cocks and boys get over the phase more comfortably in the country?" she said with simple sweetness, "especially if there's—some responsible person to guide them in the difficult endeavour, you know."

"Good God!" he thought, "she's alluding to herself!"

"We stand on such different platforms, you and I, Mrs. Antrobus," he said with great severity, "that we could hardly hope to agree—upon any subject, perhaps. The sight of a lot of fellows making asses of themselves in the face of the public, on the eve possibly—indeed, I may say probably—of an important examination, is not a spectacle to enlist the sympathies of the man who is responsible to the young fools' parents. It's the results of the examinations and the statistics of the establishment in which he happens to be interested that alone concern *him*."

This was the longest speech he had ever made to a woman, and he blushed hard.

Audrey gave him some lemon-cream.

"I can quite understand," she said, with unruffled serenity. "I've never looked at an Army crammer yet but I've been sorry for him. The awful thing is that the most important parts of a boy to himself are those least important to his tutor. It's the most difficult problem! A boy wants such a lot of sifting and sorting out before you can get hold of the right bit of him, free it from rubbish and nail it to the subject uppermost in *your* mind. If it strikes him, of course, at the first go off, it's all right—Nature does the rest; but if it doesn't, he'll offer you all the wrong things first. It must be a frightful grind for a man who has never idled to understand an idler." She cast a look of impersonal admiration round the table. "To understand things, you must have lived them, don't you think? and boys are so curious! You have to reach

them through such mysterious windings. They're more plain, of course, to people as bad as themselves—like me, for instance. The great thing, I've found, is to get them to admire themselves for things in them they have never suspected. That has the most extraordinary effect."

Andrew looked apprehensive and was about to speak, when, casting a melting glance at him, she kicked his shins sharply under the small round table. In nervous silence he ate a peach.

"I have no doubt it would have a most extraordinary effect, Mrs. Antrobus," said Mr. Frazer unsmilingly. "Boys are fatally open to flattery."

"But is it flattery?" she meekly inquired. "Isn't it unearthing nice little bits of them they haven't the wit to get at themselves?"

Mr. Frazer's sorrow for Antrobus was now poignant. Would this amazing woman never cease? The prospect of intimate companionship with a genius that but one brief hour ago so enthralled him was already losing in intensity. The skies had changed. The glow had departed from the enchanted air.

In a gentle, unobtrusive way Audrey put a splendid nectarine on his plate. Andrew watched her in silence. From her very expressive kick and some look in her eyes that demanded both attention and obedience he was now aware that she had a purpose in her strange behaviour, and the weight of his own imminent implication in some thing not unlike criminal cruelty to a brother, made him thankful enough for any passive respite.

"I knew a boy once," said she, "whom no one could teach. He had brains, they all said, but he was hopeless. He gave a bad name to three good crammers. Then he smashed himself up out hunting one day and I helped to nurse him; I was staying in the house, and he liked me to be about. One day, the day-nurse had to go out for the afternoon, and left me in charge, and suddenly he got delirious and a good deal more interesting than ever he had been in his right mind. He said out everything

that had been going on in his mind for years. To listen to a boy in an absolutely relaxed state is pretty scaring, I can tell you—and very good for your education. I oughtn't to have left him, I know," she said with a pretty air of apology. "The nurse gave me entire charge, but I knew a nice young footman I could trust, and gave him full directions. So I put on my habit and galloped across to his last crammer's, and—it was dark and the sleet was awful, and his temper worse; his language was inconceivable—but I made him come and listen. Once he began, he went on, I can tell you. He listened till dinner-time, and you should have seen his face, just!"

Audrey now demurely busied herself with her own peach.

"What was the result?" said Andrew, laughing in spite of his better judgment.

"The boy passed. He's doing well in India now, and so's the crammer in Devonshire."

Mr. Frazer glared, not for any personal reason; he was thinking solely of Antrobus.

"I am sure that yours is an excellent method, Mrs. Antrobus, but, as you will admit, hardly workable."

"As a continuance no," she sighed; "that's the worst of it, and the first impulse of a boy who is not delirious is so often to convert himself into a stuffed image in the presence of a great mind. It's a sort of pride—partly, and partly the sense of his own insignificance, I think. I know it's that with myself."

Her sweet, humble glance trembled upon their faces.

"I suppose it's the old story again, differently applied. Set a thief to catch a thief," said she.

He did not contradict her. He was face to face with the real original serpent in Paradise, the betrayer of mankind. He knew now all that was to be known of the downfall of man. So much for his brief excursion into Eden. The sooner he returned to Earth the better.

Even the nectarine that she had given him was ashes upon his tongue. He wondered bitterly how the less

unyielding substance of an apple had not choked Antrobus. He looked with positive repulsion at his hostess.

It was an experience she greatly resented. Sighing, she insisted—this was pure malignity—upon his swallowing some nuts. Whilst he gulped them down she poured upon him a soft torrent of words, the sting of which lay in the occasional sharp glances of shining sense by which they were fitfully lit up. The hideousness of woman in action jarred upon his every sense, warped judgment, palsied power.

His one passionate desire now was to renounce the purpose which so lately had set his pulses racing and opened his eyes to a wondrous vision.

When they stood up it was difficult to determine which of the men looked the more dejected. Audrey's heart bled. She flicked a letter out of her pocket.

"Now, Andrew," she said, "just start Mr. Frazer on his first cigar in the laboratory——"

"I don't smoke, thank you."

"Oh!" she said sorrowfully.

That he should be denied even that poor consolation! No one else, when they went about doing good, had to suffer such reiterated stabs as she.

"I am sorry," she said, looking tenderly at the Wrangler.

"Then, Andrew, give him a book, please, or something. The reply to this letter must go by the early post, and you must see it first. So do forgive me, Mr. Frazer; I can't keep him long because the post goes in a quarter of an hour."

"What is it, dear?" said Andrew, coming back with a troubled brow. "This letter? And, Audrey——"

"Letter? Oh! Andrew, how can you? Can't you understand? And to be blaming me, when——"

She swung Andrew round to look at him in the light. The lightning quickness of her action knocked him out of time. He stared bewildered and moved. The quiet man surged with strange emotions. His soul longed

greatly for Mr. Frazer as a fixture in his laboratory. His reason cast him forth. Never in all his days had Andrew felt the like of this discomfort, or had the conduct of his wife been so incomprehensible and so full of an alluring interest. She was greatly to be censured, blameworthy in a way of which he could not have conceived. He loved her with a depth of passion he had not yet known.

"You know he's hopeless," she entreated.

"I find him a man of supreme ability—or, rather," he added, with a grim smile, "before luncheon I had found him so."

"And now?" coolly inquired Audrey.

"He would, I fear, not be conducive to the commercial success of an Army house."

"Well, hardly!" said Audrey; "and you're blaming me for it—*me*, when—I could cry for him—I could howl, Andrew! But do just think of the boys! And, Andrew, can't you see—can't you see anything?"

She shook him in her agitation, but apparently not into consciousness.

"See, dearest?—see what?" he replied.

"Oh, Andrew! Anything? Do you think I liked it? Goodness gracious! the one thing I longed to do was to sit like a lamb and help him to things and listen to both of you. I'm not forward, Andrew; I could worship genius in silence as no other living woman could, if—if—— Oh, bother! I tell you again you know nothing at all about me, Andrew!"

Andrew smiled in a soothing way.

"Well, anyway, I've saved you. No need now to dismiss him. Wild horses wouldn't make him come to you. Was I altogether a beast, Andrew?"

"Dearest! You were very effective!"

"I was. He'll never forgive me to the day of his death, and if you only just knew how that strikes *me*. How awful it is, and so vilely unjust, and with you thinking me forward—me! Oh! to be hated wrongfully in the way he'll hate me! Katharine's dislike will be a fool to

his ; besides, she deserves being coerced for her good, and he doesn't. He's a helpless creature at heart, and has never met the right woman. I could have done wonders for the poor man," she wailed, " if only there'd been time, and even now I have a hundred schemes for him, and he hating me like poison !

" It's a sordid sort of thing delivering a genius for his own good into a net. You can't pay his fare, Andrew ; it would be too awful ! But be sure to get his address." She paused and thoughtfully frowned. " Be sure to get his address, and give him a general invitation to the laboratory. He wants exercise, he says. He could bicycle down." She paused, still frowning, to make some inner calculations. " And couldn't you ask him down definitely, say about the middle of next month ? Andrew, do ask him—then. Please don't forget ! And now, fly to him, oh, do ! or he'll be hating me worse than ever, and it's so awful ! Oh, Andrew ! I have to bear a good deal more for you than ever you'll know. No ; don't begin to say things, please. You must just go !

" Everything always costs a lot more than you expected," she said, with imploring eyes, turned with no apparent reason to heaven. " It's all frightfully horrid," she sighed when she had flown to her room and was looking across the heather and the pines and the wide, dim distance beyond, to the great fringe of grim sadness wherein London lies. " Presently, when that Wrangler knows—*everything*, he'll be uplifted in a way he never was before. He'll feel that he knew all along, and he'll be certain to the day of his death that what he doesn't know about women isn't worth knowing. And to have that effect on a man who's barely begun ! It's extremely hard and most unfair ! It's—it's slimy ! I wish Larry weren't so far away ; I feel just awful ! "

She crouched down beside the sofa and cried bitterly.

And now, as always in this sad and lonely world, the light shone on patiently in the darkness, and when the heart is riven sometimes a little gleam steals in.

CHAPTER XIV

AUDREY had started upon her audacious enterprise airily enough. To hoodwink and defy a God against whose variable decrees her little light Pagan heart had always rebelled, seemed in the beginning anything but a momentous affair, and for a time she was justified of her temerity. Her wild spirit, tired of beating its ineffectual wings in nothingness, found ample opportunity in the spacious and vital airs in which she now found herself for high, effective flight. It flew hither and thither upon merry wings, full freighted with blessings, and when weary of legitimate service, could always amuse itself by dropping them stealthily at Katharine's great square-toed feet.

This was a revenge so subtle and full of consolation that Mrs. Antrobus caught herself being quite fond of Katharine in flashes.

But to convert Adeline from the extraordinary perversion of common sense with which her worship of God had filled her, and ward off the logical consequences of her astounding creed from the poor dying body, worked like an inspiration in Audrey.

She was wise in her generation, and never permitted the rigour of God or man to make her intolerant to either, and her mad blood leapt to every experience.

Even after a lurid half-hour with Adeline's conception of Infinity, when she came face to face with the roses, in a way all her own, Audrey loved God a little for their sake. A curious sense of protection was now growing

up in her silently. It seemed to enlarge the borders of her consciousness, to uplift her.

Sometimes as she went out into the garden in the evening to think of Larry, and bid the flowers good-night, in the intimate presence of this inner expansion, her eager lips parted, her longing eyes were wet. She threw out her arms to gather into them and hold and keep from all harm—not Larry, that was the thing which confounded her—never Larry—with the whole of her crying out for Larry, but every one, every living creature who could be bruised, or hurt, or suffer wrong.

When this happened to Audrey, it seemed to her that it was she only in all the world who knew enough to treat such tender hurts. That it was for this she had been born; for this, and not for Larry, that she should be set free. It seemed as though it were for her, as for no other, to clothe with her strength the weakness of those who were not yet ready to stand alone; to protect the faltering footsteps of those that made for strength.

As a new experience it fascinated her. Sometimes she bitterly resented the voiceless entreaty of the shadowy crowd which stretched out trembling hands to her. Once in her extremity she beat them off with all the delicate strength of her little clenched fists.

It was Larry whom she loved so tenderly, so dearly, so passionately! Larry, for whom she was getting ready with such unsparing exertions!

Perhaps it was the first foreshadowings of her destiny stirring in Audrey, the dawning sense of her royal birth, her pride of place, which holds woman as the mother of man nearer to God than all His other creatures, nearer even than the poet, that so transformed Audrey and so infuriated her.

For the moment of irrational rapture was always followed hot-foot by one of irrational wrath, and both moods combined, always made Andrew appear more intrusive and *de trop* than ever. He seemed in some vague, exasperating way to be associated with the helpless moaning

things it was, it would seem, her mission to succour and shelter. He lay in her heart like a bruise. Andrew! who had always stood in awkward embarrassment without its closed doors.

It was just like Andrew in his latest phase, and in the circumstances inexcusable. It was, anyone must admit, sheer impertinence on the part of any man who knew as little of a woman as Andrew did, to be haunting and torturing her and interfering in her duties in the way he was now doing. Andrew's alteration was certainly not altogether for the better. He appeared to be developing a "coarse thumb" and his very breeding should have saved him from that!

"And I literally bursting to do my best for them all!" said Mrs. Antrobus.

Andrew's looks, both plangent and otherwise, had been peculiarly trying to Audrey in the hours succeeding the ousting of Mr. Frazer. So overwrought was she that she fled at last to her violin, but finding that also could play her false, she wrote a letter to Larry which greatly bewildered the long-suffering, simple and deeply-disappointed man, so full was it of Audrey in a frankly fermenting condition.

After tea she strolled down to post her letter, and see what Adeline could do for her. Also, for her part, to amuse Adeline with a full and veracious account of her morning's adventure.

By this time an odd understanding had grown up between the pair. Except for the one thing that mattered, which lay in each crouching behind the bars in the great silence, they had no concealments one from the other, these women.

To pour herself out to so staunch and unseeing a friend often made the minutes fly trippingly for Audrey, and Adeline supped life from the glancing flow.

Her present narrative suited the powers of Audrey, and she was a born actress. So graphic was she, indeed, in gesture, tone and attitude, that Katharine, bearing

down with a draught for Adeline, fetched up short, and dropped limply on a seat. Her fears were abundantly fulfilled. She heard every word and each one turned her more rigid.

Had Audrey lost her wits? Or Andrew? Was it he who had gone as mad as a March hare? Andrew's sporadic worship of an iridescent bubble was grievous enough, but was it possible that he had now become the puppet of a malignant sprite?

A Senior Wrangler of unimpeachable record, and respectable parentage, to be turned with contempt from Andrew's door, because, forsooth, Herodias had demanded it! Was it for this she had given him her life, and insisted upon the sacrifice of those weaker than herself? For this, that Adeline should now lie a-dying!

She paused to steady her senses and listen with closer attention. As she watched with a face of stone the magical play of hand and form and face in Audrey, listened to the rhythmic melody in her voice, Katharine's whole being set harder.

"I can see her dancing around, or upon—she would spare nothing—the bleeding head of the Baptist. I can see Andrew looking on."

The spectacle fascinated Katharine. She put down the medicine glass and clenched her hands.

The horrible farce drew to its close. She shuddered at Adeline's blasphemous laugh, half rose at the blessed return of her scruples, rejoiced grimly at the sharp, quick pain in her worn face, and the instant her sense of sin had sent Adeline huddling down in the pillows, flattened her, so to speak, Katharine arose to her full height, a giant refreshed. She was about to fall upon both the sinners when withheld, in spite of herself, by another lightning quick change in Audrey.

With a swift, impatient twitch of her thin, child-like shoulders, a shake of the gallant little head, she steadied herself, and was now hovering like an angel above Adeline, doing little tender things for her, soothing and reassuring

her. A sweet, elusive charm had transformed the scene. The echo of some eternal pain was now in Audrey's face; even her soft, mocking laughter went well with the growing twilight.

The reaction was so sudden and complete that Katharine gasped and sat down again. Was *she* also bewitched? This light woman, who had just done shameful evil to one whose shoes she was not worthy to untie, and robbed her husband of a congenial companion!

Katharine stood up and shook herself, limb by limb, as though she were casting out the devil. An essay she had once written in a sportive mood recurred to her. It concerned the mimic genius inherent in the Gallic race.

"Just as I once said," she murmured. "Her grandmother was a Parisian. She does not *act* the thing, she *is* it. A consummate actress. God help her husband! Herodias were less ruthless," said Katharine. She advanced quickly, gave Adeline her medicine, then in a few well-chosen sentences she permitted Audrey to become articulately aware of what she precisely thought of her. Miss Antrobus had an effective method of conveying information, and had only upon the rarest occasions been entirely frank with her sister-in-law. Audrey in her turn was even more sparing of her words than Katharine, and she chose them more wittily, without losing one jot of her dignity; she was telling in the finest degree. She left Katharine curbing, with bit and bridle, her baffled rage, and floated home in the mist of tender blue with a heart feeling every bit as cruel and bloodthirsty as her primitive prototype, and of a more evil complexion. A century or so can add a good deal in subtlety and meaning to the hatred of woman to woman, and evoke in it vasty deeps of resource and cunning. The modern woman has to be sure gained in refinement.

Katharine came up next morning determined to have her say. She had given Andrew her life and the lives, also,

of the two others. She had, at least, the right to speak the word that might save him from utter destruction.

She had made, as usual, straight for the laboratory, and Audrey, who felt her presence somewhere about, had been lying in wait for her; so when she emerged from the side door, she found herself, so to speak, in the smiling face of Audrey, who triumphantly conveyed her to the drawing-room and insisted upon her staying to luncheon.

"But, first," she said, "let me show you the way I've had the bedrooms divided."

Half an hour before this Audrey had seen what she knew to be a second applicant for the situation riding up the avenue with a notably good seat on one of the local jobmaster's screws. She had surveyed him for some minutes through an open window, and, being satisfied, had left him and Andrew undisturbed. She was now resolved that he should get over the taste Katharine would undoubtedly have left in his mouth in peace and at leisure, and that Andrew should have time to recover himself, so she put forward luncheon a quarter of an hour, and arranged in her own mind that before it was over, he should definitely know Katharine's precise position in the household.

Having thus far fulfilled her conscience, she chevied Katharine upstairs and down, until she felt a happy assurance that every bone in her stiff body ached badly.

The precautions of Mrs. Antrobus were not uncalled for. Seized upon by a lurid fear that Miss Antrobus intended to be an active partner in the cramming concern, Mr. Norman had been mentally rearranging his outlooks. Andrew, in the fatal shadow of Katharine's accusing eye, was distinctly nervous and at his worst. He plunged with incontinent haste into the prevalence of hay fever, and the horrible authority with which Miss Antrobus had settled the question for all time almost resolved Mr. Norman's hesitation into a lusty "No."

He felt extremely sorry. He had cogent reasons for desiring the position. He had heard of it from having met Mr. Frazer, who had been at his own college, upon his return from his foiled enterprise. This gentleman spoke feelingly, and in listening to his unvarnished tale of the potential crammer's wife put against his own ideal of Andrew Antrobus,—there was a quiet academic fragrance about the name Andrew had left behind him which engaged the imagination of many of those who followed in his steps, and looked confidently forward to his future —he had found himself irresistibly attracted.

But with this desolating lady a fixture in the establishment, his fervour sensibly declined. Andrew, himself again with Katharine's departure, caused within him a new upheaval of enthusiasm. He was in a state of judicial attention when he came into luncheon.

Mrs. Antrobus greeted her guest with artless sweetness, and turned with a nice wifely air to her husband.

"I've just seen a purple emperor on the cystus," said she, "and it was quite three inches long."

Mr. Norman looked at her with great interest.

"Purple emperors are rare about here," he said. "That must be the same one Miss Antrobus saw just now. She stated its length to have been an inch and three-eighths. It must have grown in the interval."

He spoke in a level, pleasant sort of voice. There was an element of intelligence in his cynicism, and he was not in the least impertinent. He held the balance at precisely the right angle.

Audrey looked and laughed.

"You have a good eye for fallacies," she said. "I hope you have also some mercy for them. At the same time, I believe that butterfly was nearer three inches than an inch and three-eighths. It looked endless. You rode over?"

"Yes. I intended to walk, but I met a temptation in the shape of a horse belonging to a Mr. Cyrus Bull, pure Saxon, I should think, with the financial genius of a Jew, and I yielded to it."

"I know the man," said Andrew with concern. "I wish we'd known, and we could have sent for you."

"But," said Audrey eagerly, "you enjoyed the ride?"

"I did immensely. It had the right incentive; it was a pleasure I couldn't afford, and I had a fixed determination to get the better in the end of Mr. Bull by extracting more enjoyment out of the deal than he could have conceived possible, considering the nature of the screw he gave me."

"You do like horses! And you take a delightful view of temptations."

"Mrs. Antrobus, you don't seem to see that you're prejudicing my chances." He glanced at Katharine frozen to her seat, then turned with a frank laugh to Andrew.

"If I hadn't liked horses quite so much, I think I might say without boastfulness, Mr. Antrobus, that I should run a far better chance of working under you than I do as things stand."

"The schools don't teach everything," said Andrew in queer nervous haste, avoiding Katharine's eye. He was getting into the way of trusting the face of his wife, and precipitately saying things that afterwards greatly surprised him. Knowing Katharine's eye to be menacing, he tried to explain himself—rationally. "Knowing the stuff with which you have to deal, its capacities, scope, and possible temptations, must surely go a long way."

"Scholarship," slowly pronounced Katharine, "does not surely preclude common intelligence?"

"I hope not, indeed, Miss Antrobus," said Mr. Norman. "And, Mrs. Antrobus, I assure you that my leniency in regard to temptation only applies to myself. I take a very different view of it when applied to other fellows, and I may say with perfect truth that I have been pretty successful in inducing those others to adopt the higher conception."

"I have known quite ordinary people," rigidly pursued Katharine, "with quite sufficient intelligence not even to despise scholarship."

Since no one else made any motion to speak, with ready good-fellowship Mr. Norman took the field.

"So have I, and I've known scholars big enough to despise nothing, not even fools. It's only the man with an infinite capacity not to get bored, who can interest himself by nature in anything with life in it, who can get at the best in life, don't you think? The man who taught me more than any other man ever did, and I went to him a hopeless slacker." He mentioned a world-known name "you all know him, of course. He sought out my one vulnerable spot and worked up from that. In my case it happened to be horses. You have fine stables here, Mr. Antrobus. I suppose you'll let the boys who can afford it, ride."

"I hadn't even thought of that yet," said Andrew.

"Now come to luncheon," said Audrey with a radiant face, "and after luncheon, while you two talk, we'll go and see old Bull's screw. You will come, won't you, Katharine? You're not in a great hurry surely, to-day. Miss Antrobus," she explained "lives nearly two miles away, and she doesn't spare us much of her time, This is the first time for weeks you've lunched with us, Katharine; do take some olives done with cream—do! This is a new cook. I'm getting her ready for the boys, and how can she be expected to do her best unless we appreciate her efforts? People seem to forget that cooks are human beings."

"It's the fact in regard to boys you're plainly determined not to forget," said Mr. Norman appreciatively.

"I'm afraid it's the only side of them I'd ever remember," said Audrey with a pensive sigh.

"I doubt it," said Norman; "boys have a way of forcing cryptic facts upon your recognition. I never met anyone like a boy for broadening your outlook, and giving it a leg-up. I think," he added, in rather a shy way, "you don't slack with any real comfort to yourself with boys about."

"That acts both ways," said Audrey. "I don't think

the boys could slack with any real comfort to themselves with you about."

"That's the one thing in life I should like to be sure of," he said, peeling a pear. "I say, Mr. Antrobus, aren't you going to make some stringent rules in regard to the use and misuse of your tools and things in that laboratory? You have a magnificent show down there, and you can't let loose a dozen unmuzzled bulls in a china shop without paying the price, and chemistry and lawless spirits I find invariably go together."

"It didn't strike me," said Andrew, hesitating. His ideas, save on his own lines, did not flow, and slewing himself round to those demanded by the new situation, even with the aid of his peerless wife, was a ponderous process for Andrew. "I am, as you know, only starting the thing——"

"And unless you can talk it over in peace, it'll never get started at all," said Audrey, an unconditional "yes" radiating from her whole person. "You do smoke?" She turned almost entreatingly to Norman.

"Well, yes," he admitted; "my vices don't lie as a rule in negations."

Buoyed up by instinct, the authorization of Audrey, and a secret horror of the accumulative incursion of a plague of inferior intelligences in search of employment into the cherished privacy of his laboratory, the embryo crammer felt that he had found the right man. So, brushing aside the affair as settled, and led on by sympathetic understanding, he relapsed into some dear and intimate theme in which he at once became Andrew Antrobus himself. Mr. Norman was glad enough to listen and revere, but sometimes he broke in with some word informed with a light as from a younger world which yet was the oldest of all.

In a curious, vague way he reminded Andrew of his wife—that is always supposing that Audrey had been educated. Norman surprised him, in short, more than once in somewhat the same way that Audrey did. Mr.

Norman, for his part, sincerely enjoyed his ideal scientist and the contemplation of a mental organism which for years had been straining in one direction suddenly by no volition of its own forced into a dozen alien ones. Its piteous, creaking efforts in the processes of readjustment filled him with great compassion, and let loose in him an amount of energy he had hardly suspected in himself. Everything in regard to the position engaged his zeal, and Mrs. Antrobus in character of crammer's wife was the finishing touch.

He took his acceptation as granted, handed Andrew, on a pure afterthought, a bundle of admirable testimonials, and took over without comment a score of minor details which had escaped the consideration of the extraordinary promoters of the scheme. He even engaged to procure a classical master in all points unexceptionable, and an intimate friend of his own, and so with the last obstacle removed, Andrew almost forgot himself and thanked God, and Mr. Norman felt a pious conviction that at last he had found his right place—one where he would have a free hand with the boys. Had he had a doubt of this, not Andrew, as man or scientist, or even Audrey, as crammer's wife, would have moved him a jot. He had lately declined three excellent posts because he refused to be bound by any man's system but his own. He was a rebel at heart, a more strict disciplinarian, therefore, than one who has never broken a law, for he knew both in the seen and in the unseen that wherewith he had to deal.

"And if this isn't the work of Providence," said Audrey that night, as she sat out on the balcony looking now up at the sickle moon entangled in the topmost branches of a tall pine, now down at the white rockets striving, in gentle rivalry with the drowsy roses, to bathe her in their sweetness. "This man on the spot to be a right hand to Andrew, the other within call for—special occasions. The boys treated like human beings. A good cook. The scheme on the point of running and Katharine squashed.

He'll keep her in her place, that's plain enough. It's all coming right. I can go soon now, thank goodness, and begin properly. Oh ! I'll soon be free, and Larry 'll have his chance, and then——"

She threw out her arms and laughed softly, richly, voluptuously, and in one instant the outstretched arms were full of a burthen of voiceless pain. A sorrow too full and deep and fierce and elemental for the solvency of tears took hold of her. It rent and tore her. It bruised her soft flesh. Her head ached with it ; her heart throbbed. She was very tired and immensely sorry for her own vague distress. It had ceased to excite or interest her. It was becoming cruel and intrusive, like Andrew. She shivered in the moonlight and crept into bed, and sobbed in the chill, unfriendly silence till she slept.

CHAPTER XV

IT was August. The rumours of war grew daily. The smaller Press had already begun to lose its head. Sincere young men, exalted by glimpses of a new light, and throbbing for recognition, bared their tumultuous hearts in the mystic atmosphere of the midnight oil. The citizen, weary with the dullness of a long peace, and yearning for he knew not what, a pother of new forces astir within him also, believed the vehement utterances, and upon stool and behind counter belaboured alike Government and Boer.

A new freshness was in the spent air, a new melody in the tired ear; dulled eyes looked up from the dust to see the light that each believed he had left behind him with his boyhood still shining, serene and unchanged, a golden halo above each man's head. For the halos of the saints, which shine so hard that they break through the magic circle of darkness in which even the artist sits working, and become gold paint upon his palette, and sometimes, alas! hard hoops of gold upon holy heads, are the inheritance of the world, and still hover to and fro in the dusty streets, over the dull heads that have sold them, each for his own particular mess of pottage.

We had been at peace too long. We had grown fat and secure, and "where there is no vision the people perish." We had sinned within and without, and in the babel of the telephone we had forgotten to hearken to the little voice which tells the secrets in the impulse of affairs to the expectant, so we were taken unawares, and

staggered dazedly in the shock of our awakening, and some saw stars, but others the light that is eternal, waiting patiently for the seeing eye.

The spell of freedom was abroad, and many a secret door thrown open, and the boy hidden in every good man broke loose those stifling days of August, and ran a rollicking white flame up and down the lands "of the Seven Seas." One met him about the streets in weather-beaten eyes, under grizzled beards, looking up from between bent shoulders. He discovered himself, this boy, as a gleam in the sadness of failure, a light in the gloom of misapprehension. He was everywhere, he renewed old hearts, unloosed sealed fountains, and brought strange things to pass in anxious men unable to keep away from the centre of things even for a day or two, too full of new and larger cares even to go shooting. He is all for the healing of the nations, this immortal boy, he conspires for the confusion of the wise, and it is he who has made England.

He was strong in Larry just now, and at his worst had never been quite dormant in him; but now that the rigour of a great chance and a gallant goal was upon him, there was more boy than man in Larry, and by reason of it he grew in manliness in great strides. His love for Audrey enlarged and strengthened him; his passion was now no passing frenzy, it reached to the roots of his being. He grew in consciousness. He saw his shame and accepted his penalty. He recognized his responsibility with the knowledge of one who has long watched life. He saw Audrey's side of the affair as he had never before seen it. And one day, when she came to him trembling and laughing, and in the throes of some hidden agony which was mortal, to tell him the most wonderful news a woman has to tell, he drank to the dregs a curious cup. It held all things both sweet and bitter, both clean and unclean. And after that day Larry was never again quite the same man. It was his baptism into the whole of life. So many of us have to rest content with a sprinkling upon the fore-

head, but for such as Larry and Audrey there can be nothing less than total immersion.

Larry knew this, and for a moment he was stunned by the complex pain of the knowledge, but as the arrested life in him came leaping back, the sharpness of his wits appreciably increased. He could account for himself now, but what about Audrey? There was that in her matchless eyes which bade him walk warily. There were other arms stretched out for the girl with which it might be ill to cope. There were powers with which he had not reckoned astir around them.

She had run up one morning in her motor, and had called in the intervals of a shopping expedition. She looked white and very young, and until she told him, he could not make head or tail of the sorrow in her strange eyes. When he could move, he held her very close, and could no more have spoken than, her message delivered, she herself could. They were accepting life as life is, this boy and girl, and acceptances of this order belong to the eternal things and go forward in the silence.

"Lie here," he said at last, putting her on the sofa. "You're as white as paper, but we've got to arrange things now once for all. You must see it at last."

"I see nothing else," she said, "but they can't be settled."

"Oh, look here, Audrey——"

"It will make no difference," she said; "but go on."

"You're my affair now, altogether, darling; you know you are. The very fact of your being in—in Antrobus's house is an insult of sorts; it's a damned insult to me."

"Some people might look upon it as a damned convenience," said Audrey drearily.

"Audrey, don't! You're not the sort to say such things, dear."

"Well, considering all the circumstances, I'm the sort to say most things, aren't I?"

"It's altogether different. It's poles apart from—from—Oh, dearest, talk sense!"

"I'm trying to. *Is* it different and poles apart—from? —you weren't very definite, Larry. And I wonder if everybody'll think it's so different and such poles apart —when the time comes?"

"It is altogether different with you."

"Katharine, you must remember, will have a voice in that matter."

"Damn Katharine!"

"It wouldn't make any difference. She's immortal and all-pervading, and we've got to reckon with her."

"Oh, well, we'll be doing it together."

She got up and pushed her hair back.

"Shall we?" she said, as though to herself. "I—I feel as if we'd be doing it, each of us alone."

"Audrey! You couldn't wish me to give up going out?" he asked, his face nearly as white as Audrey's. "Forgive me, little girl," he cried in quick repentance; "as if I didn't know you, but—but——"

"Larry! I know what your chance is to you, and your chance is mine. It will make things straight for both of us, I think, somehow, and—and—perhaps for——"

She broke down at last. The very silence of her sobs made Larry afraid of those shadowy arms which defied him. In an unaccountable panic he looked up and around him, but he spoke steadily.

"Distance makes no difference," he said. "Whatever happens, we're now one, we two. We'll be always together, and I can do a lot before I go. I have no near relations, you know, any more than you have, but I know one good woman. She's a brick, and she'll stand by you, and Antrobus is a gentleman, and there may still be plenty of time. At any rate, you're mine altogether now, dearest, and we'll do the best we can together. You've always pulled things through, Audrey."

"Yes," she said, "that's the trouble. They can't spare me yet. Larry, let me speak! They want me more than ever. I've got them to that point when to desert them would be rank treachery. A few weeks will make

all the difference; I've calculated it all out. By that time Andrew will be firmly fixed in the scheme, a part of it, just as he is of his laboratory, and nothing could dislodge him. And with such a good beginning they could manage even without my money."

"Audrey!"

"Oh! don't you understand, Larry? You're so blind; you must understand! If I came to you now, if I stayed as—oh! Larry, if you only knew how I want to—to stay and get it over, and begin again and be able to sleep. I can never sleep now, but I can't desert my post any more than you could. And, Larry! You'd hate me if I did!"

"But, darling——"

"What's the use! Don't! I have to stay till the boys settle down—six of them are coming on Monday—and things are going, and Andrew has become part and parcel of them, and I can slip out quietly without bringing everything I've worked so hard to build up down about their ears. In a very short time," she said, flushing scarlet, "I'll have to leave to come to you; but one can do lots in a month. One can put them all, the whole concern, into Mr. Norman's hands; he's invaluable, and my falling out won't matter. He's most extraordinarily trustworthy and understanding, and once he gets the full hang of things——"

"It's stark, staring madness. I may be in South Africa in a month. You said a month before; now it's six weeks, and you want another month."

"What am I to do?" she said in quiet, concentrated supplication; but it was not Larry to whom she prayed, it was to something much more indefinite and far away. "They're a millstone round my neck."

"Which will drown us both unless you look out."

"It won't drown you, Larry," she said at last slowly. "And odious and abominable as it is for both of us, it's still my chance—this setting them going, and I've got to take it properly. Just as you've got to take yours. I

can funk nothing. I can't be mean just as you can't be mean. In some things women must play the game in the same way a soldier must, and this is one of the times. I don't want to believe it," she cried. "I've done my best not to, but I have to, that's all! I've been thinking so much in the night, Larry, lately. I don't like it, I can tell you, but I have to. I believe it's on the way we take our chances, you and I, that everything will depend. If war was declared to-morrow," she said with wide, sad eyes, "I'd still have to do all I can for them before I could leave them. Oh, Larry! I'd still be yours, dear; I'd always be yours; only it would be too hard on us, I think. It can't happen—it would be too hard. If you could see me there, even for a day——"

"My God, child! I don't want to see you there!"

"I don't want to see myself, and it won't happen—it can't," she said passionately. "But they want me first. They won't soon," she said in the saddest voice Larry had ever heard.

"Oh, Larry! I wonder I'm not good," she cried, "when my love for you is just like an angel in my heart. It's what makes me stay until I've finished, I think."

"I wish to God it was less of an angel, then," said the unhappy lad.

"No, you don't. Oh, Larry! Let me be as good as I can under the circumstances, when it's all so awfully horrid."

"Do you not see, Audrey, that in this delay you're putting *me* in the wrong? It makes my blood boil when I think of you in a false position down there, and me here doing nothing to take care of my own, acting like a damned coward, afraid of the consequences of my own act, and in face of what may happen any day, any hour. I never hear the yell of a newspaper boy, but I'm in a blue funk—a nice state that for a man to be in!"

"I know it all, Larry," she said despairingly; "and yet I can't leave them, not yet; I've tried—I've tried night and day, but I can't. Sometimes I think if I loved

you less I might," she said, sighing with a mystic look in her great eyes; "but my chance is more yours than mine, I think, just as yours is mine more than yours, and we've each got to take our own in the best way. I don't want to believe this either, but I've got to—I've got to!"

Suddenly she laid her head upon his breast.

"Since I've known about this," she said, and now she was lividly white, "I'm sort of driven—I think more than ever—to keep on helping them to the very last."

"My God! but I don't believe any man was ever before in such a hole," he groaned.

"But what's one to do?"

"You're mad, little girl, and you're harder than you know on a fellow."

"I'm not mad, and I know how hard it is, Larry, but it's—it's part of everything, somehow. It's part of the chance."

She drew her fingers slowly across her eyes.

"I must go home now, and, Larry, I'll be as quick as ever I can, but I'll have to finish up all I can. Oh! if only you would understand, it would be a little easier, I think."

CHAPTER XVI

THE little mean sufferings due to the littleness and meanness of our conceptions may wear themselves out with time and cossetting, without leaving one definite impression behind, still less that sense of defeat which spurs on to victory; but a pain set throbbing by Another Hand will not yield to such slight treatment; it grows in the quiet night! One may dodge and elude it in the busy day, but in the night, then comes its chance—and in the game of chance it stands upon its own ground, and we on shifting sands, mortal and defenceless. For some weeks now Audrey had given up contending with her torment. She knew what she had to expect, and simply faced it. But upon the day of the boys' arrival, the dawn of her great scheme in action, there was no trace of her dark vigils apparent in Mrs. Antrobus. She was a vision of lustrous serenity in an extremely costly embroidered frock.

There was the royal simplicity of a star about Audrey that day. For convenience sake the whole batch came over together, and each boy in succession, as he greeted her, felt his breath come shorter and wished himself more in harmony with such shining whiteness. They were all glad they wore the latest ties, and three exulted in having been at last promoted to the family tailor. No one but himself can understand what it means to a boy of sixteen to be still wrestling under the soul-destroying bondage of Messrs. Hope Brothers, when he stands five-feet-ten in his stockings, and has some pretensions to muscle.

After a moment's inspection, Audrey discerned that three out of the group, and these the tallest, were withering under this ban, and with the wisdom of a score of serpents she restored their self-respect; each for the moment forgot his little common self, was uplifted to high airs and swaggered as though he trode the firmament. With a purely animal delight in her achievement, enjoying her own inimitable effect to the full, Audrey started them out on the right track, and in life at a crammer's more perhaps than in any other life, it is the first step that counts. Before her smile of dismissal had sent them blundering into the background, Mrs. Antrobus had conferred upon the three victims to the reach-me-downs a hall-mark which even a tailor cannot give. The other three were jealous, and the moral development of the six rocked gaily on.

Mr. Norman, whom nothing escaped, was immensely amused, and Andrew thought that his wife looked more than ever like an angel on his hearth. Sometimes Audrey frightened him. There was that about her which filled him with disordered visions of creatures too good for human nature's daily food; he had nightmares of this being, too transcendently light for earth, taking airy flights to heaven. More than once, and always at a most inconvenient moment, he had found his hands going out involuntarily to hold her back.

The tallest of those still in bondage to Hope Brothers, and the most gawky, Macmahon, had other disqualifications which at once drew him to Audrey. Her miserable arms were now stretching out wider every minute. The advent of the boys seemed to fill them with hidden springs. Sometimes she wondered if she were going mad. Considering the strait she herself was in, to say nothing of Larry's, she ought to be keeping the power of protection now sprouting in her, very near home. But what is one to do when a lad as long and clumsy as Macmahon, and as badly dressed, is sent to a crammer's by an idiotic aunt with his clothes fastened up in one of his

sister's dress-baskets! Audrey gnashed her teeth, made Macmahon unpack without a moment's delay, and had his box switched out of sight.

She paid a visit next day to the aunt, who kept house for her brother-in-law—a dreamer immersed in the law. She behaved with great sweetness, firmness and discretion, and returned with decent baggage, and with simple lucidity explained the affair to Macmahon, taking the opportunity at the same time of complimenting him on the width of his chest.

Nothing could have been better done. Macmahon was an unlicked young cub, who had worn out the temper of many a tutor. He was, in crammers' slang, "a bad case." But with wandering thoughts of what mothers might mean to fellows, and what aunts most certainly do not, working in young blood, coupled with ideas still more vague in which women and angels and ripping good food get beaten up into a fine froth, a boy will now and then try what doing his best feels like. This is precisely what Macmahon did. He made a better start than anyone could have expected from his previous record, and Mr. Norman, who was a shrewd man, laughed and doubted.

Directly he got into the train upon his return from Surrey, he had begun to doubt. Upon the breezy, fragrant, wide space of heather getting the best out of old Bull's screw, he had been attracted and amused by Mrs. Antrobus, but with the hot breath of smoking men hemming him in, salient doubts of her came blundering from somewhere into his consciousness, and partially obscured Mrs. Antrobus.

Now he was more amused than before, and Audrey was no longer obscured, but the doubts grew, as did also her supreme importance in the concern. She was the most living presence on the premises, its life and soul, the very breath of its nostrils. She was rarely actively dominant as in the matter of Macmahon's boxes, save, of course, in her own sphere. But she was there, and, insensibly, they all drew near to her. He was drawn himself. In spite of his laughter and his doubts, he found

himself telling her things, and asking her opinion upon them.

"But why do you consult me when you don't like me?" she said one day.

"Because you always tell me what I want to know. You have a way of putting your finger upon the one bit of truth that's been dodging me. And I do like you! You know far better than I do that a man must like you whether he wants to or not. He has no choice." He paused to look, bit his lip, and laughed.

Her face was still frankly questioning him. "Well, go on," she said.

"I'm not sure of you; I don't know from Adam, why. It's a problem with which it's not for the like of me to deal. This is the last thing a man should be saying to his principal's wife. I hope you won't get me sacked, Mrs. Antrobus. It's partly your own fault. You affect me as the fellows down there in the laboratory at this moment puzzling Mr. Antrobus do; I have to be quite straight with you, and not too delicate-minded either."

"You must come one day to see my sister Adeline," said Audrey serenely. "She is not sure of me either, but she likes me very much. You can compare notes. In any case, I want you to know her, and sometimes to go and see her. Will you? Say that you will!"

Her eyes narrowed and shot out a curious glance at him.

"Of course I will, Mrs. Antrobus."

"That's a distinct promise, remember. Can you go over with me to-day? She's quite different from Katharine. She's quite altogether different."

A few minutes later, as he stood waiting for a class, he saw Mrs. Antrobus go slowly upstairs, and turned to watch her as any man would do, and her face in an angle of the staircase sketched out in a shaft of light made of his dim, indefinite doubt a sharp and definite fear.

"But what the devil——" he muttered. "What's up with her? She's getting uncanny."

From that day he watched her more intelligently, and presently he caught her defying him and thoroughly enjoying herself. She liked, it was plain, intelligent observation. It was the scrutiny of the unintelligent observers, of Andrew and the boys, that she could never learn to defy. Andrew's she could evade and elude, indeed, but the boys', never. They had brought a new atmosphere into the house, and it was a challenge and a menace in one. They were still young animals, as well she knew, with their moral forces in the slow process of emerging.

A boy may lie with a clean conscience when a man from sheer reflex action will tell the truth, but the atmosphere of the boy will be the truer, the light through which he looks for truth the more searching. It is indeed a merciless white flame scorching away every sham.

It seemed to wrap Audrey round, to beat about her and penetrate into her innermost fortress, to tear all her secrets from her. It was a cruel torture of brilliancy, this light the boys shed. And yet all the passionate beckoning things dawning in their quivering hearts cried out to hers.

They were seeking things together, she and the boys; to the most wonderful things the hearts of all of them were reaching out, and yet—and yet—here they were burning all the veils that hid her from a world of accusers. They were betraying her, she who was weaving the very fabric of their lives into hers, undoing her who was straining every nerve to make them!

Audrey could always snatch dreams from a country very far away, and but for sordid necessity, lest they should obsess her practical outlook, she would never systematically brush the shadowy visitors aside. Nothing that could destroy or hurt was ever given voluntary foothold in Audrey; she was by nature constructive, not destructive, excepting when she chose to destroy in order to build up again to her own pattern; and now, when she found herself in the midst of the bricks and mortar of which men are made, the eternal passion of the builder

inherent in woman got hold of her. It moulded old ideals into shapes she knew not; it brought forth new ones. It quickened her pulses. It was like good wine in her blood, and yet it steadied her. She grew in lucidity.

The fact that she knew so much, and the boys so little, stilled the tumult of her being. She was held in a new poise. And in a way all her own—a royal way, by being, as it were, one of them—she reigned supreme over the boys. She never interfered now or asserted herself, that unbecoming necessity was at an end. What was now required of her, it was plain, was just to sit tight and let all the nice secret hidden things in her flow out, and fill up, and make soft and cushiony the barren, windswept spaces and cold, unkind recesses and corners where hearts are sure to get hurt, perhaps beyond healing.

She felt as if she could hold in the hollow of her hand the career of each of those boys, who, each in his turn, had to fare through the vision of the cloth of all things, clean and unclean, which leads in the end to knowledge. She could see them, one by one, tearing off the poor little rags of defence with which they hid themselves from all the others who knew, believing her and trusting her. She could be busy day and night in the most ravishing way. She need never be bored again. She could live! live! live!

Her eyes would be quick to things that could baffle the most uplifted saint or scientist who ever lived. Her swift, small hand could turn to the right creatures whom the big, slow hand of a man might send blundering to the left. The place was made for her, and she for the place! An endless procession of boys all wanting her, all stretching out helpless arms to her, would pass before her wistful eyes when she lay awake at nights.

When this happened she generally cried herself to sleep. Not that she loved Larry any the less; far from it. She loved him infinitely more than she had ever loved him, but there was a new note in the love, and it frightened Audrey. It made her a little silent also, and the reflective

look growing in her great eyes was very bewildering to thoughtful men. All that she did she did quickly and quietly, and now that her duties were quadrupled she did them more quickly and quietly still. Everything in house and garden went by clockwork, and when she had finished with these she now set to weaving the wizardry of her presence into her own room. Each day it grew more intimately like Audrey. And in her room, or in her garden, she was always ready just to wait and to draw people to her.

It was a brilliant, absorbing pursuit, a soul-stirring occupation. It was like the unfolding of a magical gift. Mr. Norman watched her laughing, and still with a doubt; and, meanwhile, Larry's last thread of patience was strained to breaking-point.

Audrey, in her new self and her new love, was so great and overpowering a wonder that he felt like a woman in her hands. She had thrown her spell upon him to some purpose. The smouldering mystery of the passion which was transforming Audrey lived in her voice, her bearing, her letters. Larry did not pretend to understand her; she would have confounded a philosopher and he was a plain man. He felt, in a way, bound to obey her, to respect some sacred obligation she had put upon him, but there was a limit to all things. Rumours were now practically facts. Any day he might get his orders.

He would give Audrey one more chance, and then take the law into his own hands. He would face Antrobus, and tell him the whole truth, and take on all the consequences. At all costs he would shoulder his responsibility, and do all that a man could for Audrey.

Audrey was getting out of her own hands, and out of his, and the more he speculated as to the cause of it the less he knew. He was as much at sea in regard to the powers working in Audrey when he sat down to deliver his ultimatum as he had been for weeks, but not understanding the reason of the thing made him only the more alive to its significance. Many diverse circum-

stances were combining to educate Larry, and he hoped eventually even to understand Audrey. Meanwhile, he would act as one who has left childish things behind him, and insist upon taking care of her even against her will; and no matter what the forces might be, to pit himself against them.

Even if there were a bad scandal, they couldn't spare him now. It was the hour of the young man, and he had taken it with both hands. He knew well that he had made himself invaluable both in the regiment and outside it. His position now was very different from what it had been a month ago. He was sure of his chance, but he must be sure of Audrey too. He explained the position to Audrey with unswerving clarity in a very sensible letter.

Ever since Larry had stood up to life and decided at last to act as a man grown, Audrey knew that when he made a resolution he would keep to it, and she knew that this letter of his was final.

She had kept him quiet for a long time, but now her power was broken. He wrote on Monday, and on Thursday things must be settled one way or the other. This was certain, and once more Audrey found herself in a tight place.

CHAPTER XVII

AUDREY was in the garden when Larry's letter came. The moon was now in her third quarter, a brilliant conquering queen, who had lost the proud, tremulous delicacy of her first youth. Trees and flowers and grass were bathed bounteously in her white radiance. The stars shone frostily in the blue deep. The air was bright and pure and fragrant. All the tenderness of spring was in the world, and more than its sadness. Perhaps it was the leafy things and the flowers that had been nipped into doubt by the first frost, so with the foreshadowing of death in their hearts, their vision of the resurrection, the birthright of the dumb things, had been blurred for the moment.

It was the half-hour's recess after dinner, and before evening study, and it had become an established habit in the household that one or other of the boys should bring its mistress her evening mail, and this evening the lot had fallen upon Macmahon.

It was always pretty hard for Audrey to read Larry's letters under the searchlight of adoring inexperience, but she had not been Audrey had she funked the ordeal. A rapid glance told her that this was a letter to be read at leisure; so with all its significance flooding her heart, she put it into her bodice, looked at a note or two, and turned to Macmahon. His mouth was wide open. His eyes inclined to goggle. The effect of the remote and incomparable She on a lad who gets slowly through his phases is rarely becoming. Her finished perfection pricks him in strange and unaccustomed places. It is a challenge

to the evil in him as to the good. If he adores, he also resents. She will bring home to him his incompetence as no other power on earth can do, and it is, as we know, the first impulse of the half-awakened to shrink from the light.

Macmahon, moreover, had committed the cardinal error of obtuse boyhood in laying himself open to the worst side of any tutor, who in his brief career he had given good cause to curse both God and man. It could be safely said of Macmahon that he had never known the best side of any grown man save in fleeting flashes which left no impression, until within the last fortnight.

His father, from time immemorial, had devoured his breakfast wrapt in a dream, and was invisible to his family the rest of the day: he always dined at his club. As flesh and blood he did not count at all. His elder brethren mildly regarded him as a confirmed rotter, glanced without comment at his outrageous reports, and brushed him from their memory.

Thus left to his own devices, he set up a fabulous conception in his disorderly mind as to the immutable characteristics of those in authority, and conscientiously acted up to it.

But now he was being greatly exercised in his mind, in his new and illuminating experiences, as to the inherent humanity potential even in tutors. No insertion of any new leaven can take place without well-defined discomfort, and to see one's tinsel armour of defence dropping off in pitiful peelings, must be very humiliating to any poor boy.

To be forced into admitting that all the tutors were more or less in the right and yourself in the wrong, would try the temper of a ripe angel, much less of a raw lad, to say nothing of finding yourself the biggest fool in a group not famed for wisdom.

Macmahon, in short, was being revealed to himself and others like unto him as an egregious ass. A fool newly alive to his folly is apt to be hypersensitive, the boy

was finding himself in a robust atmosphere, and the hideous predictions of a score of infuriated instructors became iron-bound facts to him. His sufferings were severe, and although an irresistible attraction drew him to Mrs. Antrobus, she was, nevertheless, Macmahon's last straw. He had, indeed, grabbed her letters, like the bear he was, from another aspirant, and now with throbbing pulses awaited her recognition; but in the radiance of her presence every idiocy of which he had ever been guilty seemed to batter about his wretched ears.

Had Audrey not known that she hurt Macmahon quite as shrewdly as he hurt her, she had now sent him flying. With his mouth open and his eyes screwed up, and Larry's letter burning at her heart, he was too impossible altogether, but she looked again, and her eyes and her heart melted. She put into uncompromising, biting words all the inarticulate ills of the poor "hard case," and in the same breath she sighed, and longed to be at his ears. They were so flat and broad, and she knew in her bones that he would end as everything else seemed to do, in just making things a little more difficult for *her*. But in any job a chance is a chance, and catch Larry missing the least little one of his!

"There's half an hour to spare," she said lightly. "Shall we go down to the pond and see if any wild duck are about? I hear you got on awfully well at the jumping yesterday. How did you manage it? You can't have had much practice living in town all your life."

"Oh, well! One likes to do something fairly well," he said, glowing.

"One would like to do everything pretty decently," she said, trying not to sound virtuous. "The difficulty is in doing it."

"It comes natural to some people," he sighed, with a furtive look at her. She glanced at the moon.

"Does it, I wonder? I don't think the people to whom things come too easily would ever make the best soldiers. Getting over difficulties, I should have thought,

would be the best training for a soldier. That's why I think that the fellows who find exams. an awful grind often come out better in the field and camp than geniuses. They've got used to pulling through by the skin of their teeth. They don't expect easy victories or walk-overs in anything. They've got to swat for it. You can win your spurs in lots of ways, don't you think? And, after all, if you can't get the better of a book, how can you expect to get the better of a man? And you can't lick him into shape until you have got the better of him. If I were going up to Sandhurst," she cooed, "I'd look at the toughest book as a sergeant would look at the toughest recruit; I'd see what I wanted in it, and I'd get it, just as the sergeant does with the recruit if he's worth his salt. It would make books and recruits so immensely interesting instead of being repulsive bores."

"Oh!" said Macmahon, goggling worse than before.

"Listen!" she said. "That's the flap of a duck's broken wing. Some idiot broke it late last winter, and she couldn't go away with the others. I've been tracking the creature all the summer. If I could catch her, I'd set her wing. I've set many a broken limb for a bird, but she's too cute."

"Is there nothing you can't do?"

She paused, and her smile puzzled the boy.

"Several things," she said.

"If—if you were a man, would you be a soldier?"

He shot his remarks at her in an explosive way. He had contracted the habit at school, and now that his voice was breaking, the result was startling, but Audrey did not flinch.

"Why, of course I should. It's a nice, big, alive life. You can stretch in it, and always have to keep your eyes skinned so as to keep things going and yourself and everything else up to the pink of perfection. Oh, it's a live life!"

"Would you make *all* your sons soldiers if you had 'em?"

"If I had a dozen sons they should all be soldiers!"

She said it impulsively, then she flushed scarlet and stooped down to the water.

"It's full of minnows and they're all asleep," she said.

"I'm glad you like soldiers."

"Good ones! I hate slackers. I always think that if a fellow will funk work—finding it difficult only makes for his final success—he'll funk fire, and a cowardly soldier is a thing I simply can't understand or forgive. I'd shoot him as I would a gun-shy dog! Listen to that aggravating duck and the swish of the trailing wing! If he's that sort of thing, it's such gross impudence his wanting to be a soldier. An inferior animal may do quite well, and live and die and be forgotten in other pursuits; but a soldier, to disgrace himself in the very smallest thing with every little gutter-snipe in the kingdom panting to catch him out! I should hate a profession that hadn't some real proper ideal you can get hold of in it. Some ideals are so floating and far away, but a soldier's is so plain and upstanding; it just suits my wits."

She paused tentatively. Macmahon's conversation, it was true, did not flow, but he seemed to be wrestling with something in the silence. Plainly he needed time.

"Just think of having the honour of England in your very heart," she said with serenity, "and having your hands and head just given you to keep it clean! The Army is the finest monopoly in the whole world, and it's worth any grind to belong to it. The dirtiest little recruit going would be a poet if he knew all that he represented," she said, with a lift of her regal head.

Macmahon fairly spluttered.

"And it's such plain sailing, really. It only means to keep your head under all conditions, and to be prompt and to the point, and to expect first-rate work from everyone, and to see you get it. It's a nice clean job."

Macmahon uttered a long "Oh!" Audrey drew his attention to the light upon the water; the moon made a halo about her head. Macmahon felt beside himself.

"If—if I hadn't come here, I think it's very likely I'd have gone to the bad," he said at last, in jerks of some violence. "Perhaps, later on I'd—I'd have funked."

"I can't believe that."

"You might if you knew, just! You take a very different view of things from my people, you know." His full-stop was a click.

"They're putting me into the Army because I happen to be a fool, and would be sure to run a mucker in the Law. You see, I wasn't even fit for a parson, because we expect D.D.'s in our family, not to say bishops."

Mrs. Antrobus coughed. Her ethical sense, though still invertebrate, forbade her telling Macmahon what precisely she thought of his people, and a veiled hint needs a moment's reflection.

"I've noticed before," she said, "that very advanced scholars are not always quite fair to the Army. They judge it by its failures, and not by its successes. If anyone was so rash as to attempt to put me into the Army because I wasn't fit for the Law, I'd just show them! I'd work till simply I burst, till I made them eat every word and just understand what it means to be a soldier and all a soldier stands for. If you don't do well after a send-off like that, Macmahon, I'll never believe in anyone again."

The compliment was somewhat subtle to one unused to flattery. Macmahon had to pause before he could master it. And Audrey, believing both herself and Macmahon to have had enough, suggested that they should return to the house.

Silence seemed best to befit both the hour and the occasion. They paced soberly side by side. Then a queer gurgle somewhere deep down in Macmahon drew the attention of Mrs. Antrobus from her own affairs. She glanced at him from the tail of her eye. There were tears in his eyes, and the moon was turning them into black diamonds.

"Goodness gracious!" she protested; "as if I hadn't enough without this!"

She was aware of a furtive finger poking out the dampness; then Macmahon fetched up short and looked at her with praiseworthy steadiness.

"If—if you'll help me, Mrs. Antrobus, I—promise you I will—I'll show 'em—I always knew I wanted something to buck me up."

He seemed to be wrestling with each sentence in turn.

"And if I could get it, then I was no worse than other fellows—no bigger an ass, you know. But—I never knew till now what it was I wanted—never had a leg-up before from anyone in my whole life. If—if you'll help me, Mrs. Antrobus, I give you my word, I—I won't disappoint you. And I'll make my people sit up, see if I don't."

This was an immense speech for Macmahon. He gasped, and struck his toe sharply with his stick.

"I knew," said Audrey to her labouring soul, "I knew he'd be another nail in my coffin. And—even in the moonlight he's the ugliest boy I ever struck."

"No man can do a man's work for him but the man himself," she said, virtuous but temporizing.

"I don't want the work done," he said with a new pride. "All I want is—is—for you to—to—do—what you're doing now, you know."

Macmahon, it was clear, was expanding. There was genuine terror in the wide eyes of the crammer's wife.

"I never!" she murmured.

"You will, Mrs. Antrobus!" The lad was entreating for his life, He spoke sharply—vehemently. There was the demand almost of an equal in his voice.

"I'll do every mortal thing I can for you," said something not herself within Mrs. Antrobus, but it spoke in the golden voice of Audrey.

Macmahon, who never could do anything gracefully, started, grunted, and slithered down two steps, slippery in the dew of the night.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE moon had sailed down over the pines, left the pond she had turned to silver to the blackness of night, stripped the wide stretch of heather of its vesture of white, and carried the wizardry and the wealth of her presence away over the low hills to the valleys beyond.

Andrew's old house looked dim and full of peace. Men and boys and servants slept—the sleep of the just. Even the white owls were back in their cosy crannies and the bats at rest in the ivy.

The spirit of peace herself seemed to brood above the old grey gables. It had laid a stilling hand even upon Audrey, who, wrapped in a white cloak, sat immovable as a statue out on the balcony. So long as the moon was up she had been restless enough. She had moved from her room to the balcony, from shadow to shine, with the noiseless gliding persistence of the moon herself. She swayed to the pressure of contending forces blindly, with protestations; but she held her ground and kept her head, and the fierce exultation of the fight was upon her.

So long as the light held out the issue was all for Larry and the joy of life, but the instant she was gathered into the darkness it was quite another story with Audrey. Soft hands of entreaty were again about her, little mute voices cried to her for help, and her promise to Macmahon set her brain aflame. She plunged into her room and switched on every electric light, but that altered nothing. It was the old, friendly light which had known them

together—she and Larry—so long, that made all the difference. The electric light showed out every flaw in her scheme of life, and brought great glaring fears flapping in about her.

The darkness has advantages the light does not possess. If there is a glass in the room one must naturally be looking at it, and Audrey had seen things going on in her altering eyes which frightened her; and as we know, she was wise in her generation, so now she sat motionless in the darkness thinking. She was at bay at last! She had known for some time that when Larry once took command he would accept nothing less than unconditional surrender. She could make no terms. Had there been one doubt as to Larry's ultimate power to master her, she could never have loved him as she did, and everything would at once have been easy.

Her love had been growing lately in the strangest way. It filled, and steadied, and enlarged her. It was a different thing altogether from the wilful, uncontrolled folly which had bared life to two young fools. Now it was part of some illimitable immensity which seemed to be hers, yet hidden from her. She stood before it trembling with expectation, and yet she was held as in a vice at some secret parting of the ways.

The joy of the whole world was so near her that its glow leaped up through the darkness; she felt through all the chill of night its warmth upon her cheek; her breath came in short, quick gasps as it met some leisured breath from finer airs; it blew about her, articulate with invitation and wonder. It waited, and called, and warmed this speaking silence, for between her and the whole of joy she knew with a mystic certainty of knowledge there lay also the whole of pain. She saw quite clearly two paths. One shallow white road went down with an easy sweep, but the mystery of immensity lay at the spring of the upland one, and to climb was in the warp and woof of Audrey.

And all the time love lay weeping and entreating in her

heart, and that, too, blocked the way, for love was also great and eternal, and full of mystery. All the littlenesses seemed that night to be stripped from Audrey. She stood alone an earth-born sprite, without one glimmer of conviction of sin, concerned only for her feelings, and fighting with giants.

And never once were her eyes blinded to the truth. Her baptism of fire wherein lay victory was yet to come, and there it lay barring the way, sheer in the crook of the upland path.

That is, if she accepted the ordeal. The choice rested entirely in her own hands, but precisely what she should choose or reject was still vague in her mind.

She fought like a gallant soldier, who, although not altogether clear as to what the mortal contention is all about, would die rather than give in until something is won. Audrey was in no sort of way the general upon the height, who sees the beginning and the end and the hill that lies between.

All she knew was that there was something else besides Larry and love on one side and a deserted family and a broken law upon the other, and herself a shuttlecock between the two. There was something far greater and more insistent and compelling than even these, and this part seemed somehow to be hers, to belong to her, to be her chance, her moment, an odd deathless moment which meant everything, and this dumb conflict with blind pain alone in the night was only the preparation for it.

"But I don't understand!" she cried out at last. "What is it? but what is it? What does it all mean?" She was plainly not ready for an answer, for none came, so she hid her face in her hands and sobbed, which proved her in the end to be no more than the tiredest woman in the whole world whom nothing in heaven or earth could comfort save love and Larry.

"They're all I want," she said. "And I'd hate heaven without Larry. Anyone would, and if they didn't, they ought to be ashamed of themselves."

But it was of Macmahon's blurred brown eyes she dreamed in that dull dawn, and not of Larry's grey ones as keen as a razor.

She had no time next morning for her own affairs, and her head ached. She could not think. There were still two days. Larry must wait. She would not even write to him. There was nothing she could clearly explain. Her few hours of sleep, spoilt by Macmahon, brought her neither light nor leading. The mist of mystery seemed to draw in about her. It held down her forces with a chilly hand, in which lay some horrible purpose.

She was once more a soldier held in mute inglorious inaction by a command he dared not disobey.

She was waiting doggedly for some development.

When she was at home she always had the boys to tea with her, and to-day she made no exception. It was part of her orders, part of the scheme, part of that for which she was making ready. The only difference they saw in her was that she was, if anything, more ripping than usual, and gave them better cakes, but all she did, she did in a dream of expectation. She would like to have known of what, but by this time she had grown numb. She could now accept things with a stolid calm.

After tea, still blindly following some vague bidding, she went to see Adeline, and, sitting beside her in the room upon which she had impressed herself in a hundred ways, sat Mr. Norman, quite at home.

He was feeling rather chastened himself that afternoon by a private worry of rather an intimate order, and had nothing particular to do. He was sorry, too, for the patient, still woman, and it interested him to observe Mrs. Antrobus from her point of view. It was quaint, yet not uncomplicated with subtleties. There was a doubt in it, as Audrey had suggested, that matched his own ; but when Audrey came it was not of her brilliant personality he spoke or thought, but of the sordid enough tragedy with which his mind was charged. It was the last subject he could have imagined himself discussing with

the prim woman on the couch so ignorant of life, but as he watched her he had become aware in her of a knowledge which may fall foul of the hard facts of life from one standpoint, yet from another may throw a light upon their darkness not at the command of the man in the street. She was a person, indeed, whom one should do their utmost to defend from the rude contact of hard facts, but if a man wants to unload his mind of any burthen he will generally consult his own pleasure and convenience first. After some desultory talk it struck him that Miss Antrobus's views on a mess into which one of his friends had just got himself would be interesting.

It was the usual precipitate marriage without love, and love the implacable avenger making hay of lives and law. In this case the woman had followed her feelings and flown to the man at the most inconvenient moment. He had just passed a brilliant examination and won a brilliant post in the Near East, which, like an honourable man, without comment or complaint he at once declined. The matter touched Norman keenly; the man was his cousin and his friend; he had looked forward with sure expectation to a great career for him, and he had always liked the girl. He briefly repeated the story to Mrs. Antrobus.

"She's a nice girl," he said; "I can't understand it! She's clever, and I thought she had character enough for most things and could love a man enough to spare him. She's suffered a lot, too. Her husband had nothing but his income to recommend him—an unspeakable cad—her mother did that job—and her child died. Suffering has a way of turning out heroic women, but there's precious little heroism in spoiling a man's chance by giving way to your inclinations."

"Perhaps you don't happen to know much about love and its queer ways," said Audrey serenely.

"I do; at least, I hope I do," he said, laughing. "I've been engaged for a year now to an old-fashioned girl who's taught me something about it. She's one of the heroic

women in her quiet way, in whom love must always be founded on sacrifice."

"Oh! a man's woman!" said Mrs. Antrobus promptly.

"That doesn't describe her in the least, as you'd see the minute you saw her, or, if you didn't, then you'd say it in a very different way. And the minute after you'd describe her in detail much better than I can. You'd know her at a glance in the way you know the boys. You find them far from perfection just as you'd find Mary, but you'd know at a glance that she'd always give her best to a man and not her worst, and anyhow, she'd never come blundering into his life at the wrong moment."

"Dear me! Self-sacrifice is the one virtue men appreciate in women, and the way they worship it, with a reverence much too humble for emulation, is extremely interesting."

"It's your own fault entirely. Why do you overdo it in such an inimitable way. We're every man Jack of us just as selfish as you've made us. But it's playing pretty low down on us when, having uplifted all our expectations for years, you suddenly give tradition and yourself the lie and undo a man by a precipitate surrender to him, not only of yourself, but of all his ideals of you, and handicap him by the generous gift for the term of his natural life, because your courage gives way. It's a back-handed blow to the lot of us, don't you see? That's not the sort of love that's given woman her pre-eminence and made man her slave."

"Oh!"

"He is! You know all about it. Your whole life is governed by an unusually vivid knowledge of the fact. You yourself are a commentary on the fact. And if you knew the girl and the man, you'd understand the whole thing far better than I could; but you'd see it as I do. I'll bet my bottom dollar on that! It's a bolt from the blue. It's inexplicable! She's not that sort of woman, and she'll find out presently what she's done—not from him: he's the best fellow going—but she'll find

it out: a woman always does if she's worth the name—she'll find the first hell she tried hurt her a deal less than the last, because she didn't drag anyone else into it, her husband never counted except as a well-fed animal, and burning in unison after the first fine rapture is poor comfort."

Adeline was silently watching Audrey; she wondered if she were growing a little white.

"You're arguing in the narrow way of a mere man," said Audrey. "There were two sides. He loved her, too. He loved her first, probably—they always do. She wouldn't have gone to him unless he wanted her more than anything else in the whole world. A woman must be pretty sure of a man before she'll run away with him. If he loves her properly the appointment will be nothing to him. . . ."

"It's a good deal to his friends, and it would be a good deal more to the woman if her love had a little more grit in it."

"She has things to lose, too."

"A great many. But the sort of woman she's just proved herself to be always thinks that the world's well lost for love. I like the other sort best."

"You would!"

"So would you. It's a fine thing to be able to love a man better than he loves himself. It sounds impossible to one who knows men, doesn't it, Mrs. Antrobus, but it's done every hour of the day. Women have been hard at it from the beginning, and won't budge till the end. In ethics, as she understands them, a woman will always go one better than a man. A man will give his life for a woman, but a woman will give him back himself when he's more to her than a dozen lives. I think myself there's a sort of cosmic responsibility in the make-up of women learnt, as they sit thinking, beside generations of cradles, and it's the one fact that keeps the flag of clean living even half-mast high. There's not one woman who trips who doesn't trip up with her a dozen

men. If our leaders in this sort of thing go slithering into the gutter, what can you expect of the rank and file? I say, Mrs. Antrobus, don't!" he said with a laugh. "I'm neither a prig nor a Puritan, and this excess of moral ardour is anything but cosmic—it's purely individual. You'd feel as bad yourself if you knew Sandy and the girl."

"I know other people," said Audrey with daring eyes, "and I think you're special pleading. You're a man, the result pure and simple of—what did you call it?—'generations of women's spoiling.' You've taken all we've given, and now you turn and revile us for our gifts. I don't think you know very much about love, although probably you're very well up in being loved. I think you're extremely hard on the girl."

"Not half so hard as she is on the man and on herself; and that sort of love doesn't attract me. I don't want to know anything about it. It's cheap—a drug in the market! It's unfair to a man; it's not playing the game. If you've given us your best with both hands, all these ages, are we to sit still now and be fobbed off with your worst without a protest? You have us as you reared us! I say, Miss Antrobus, tell us what *you* think about it."

Adeline had been mutely praying for words when the time for speech should come, and now she looked at Audrey and was dumb. Audrey, without any doubt about it, had grown pale, and there was a glitter of mockery in her hard eyes. Adeline nervously blinked, and thinking that the sun was in her eyes, Mr. Norman moved a screen. That gave her time. She reached out furtively for Audrey's hand, and hid it in her shawl as though it were a contraband baby.

"I don't know that you quite deserve their best, Mr. Norman," she said with demure precision; "but if you didn't demand it and get it, I think the world would be a poorer place than it is now. The supply might run short, and then what would women do?—or men? Mr.

Norman, keep on demanding," she said, looking from Audrey to him; "and your old-fashioned girl will teach you in time, even in this matter, to give and take. One used to think that the sacrifice of herself, or—or of any one else, was the monopoly of women; a great many women think so still, I fear, and it makes them almost as selfish as men," she said with a faint smile.

"You can hit harder than I gave you credit for, Miss Antrobus. You're about right, I think," said Norman, looking at the two. "We want all we can get from you. And this fellow isn't even a man; he's a boy, practically."

"And she's a girl!" said Audrey.

"She was married at eighteen, and has suffered for it ever since. She's ten years older than Sandy, or she ought to be, anyway."

"I knew in my bones you'd be merciless to fallacies."

She was wondering why Adeline was clutching her hand in a wild way, and why her face was twitching.

"Only a boy!" said Adeline faintly. "And a woman to ruin the life of a boy! It's awful to hurt a boy, to hurt his belief and trust in women and goodness! It's the most awful thing in the world, I think. I never knew much of boys, Audrey, until you told me; and now I think I know more of those I've never even seen, except through that window—I often watch for them on the crest of the hill—look at the two now," she said with wistful eyes, "just coming down!—than ever I knew of the girls I lived with and taught for years. You show them to me, Audrey, just as they are, and I know—I know better than you, dear, for all your knowledge—how easily a woman may hurt them just at the start. Oh! Mr. Norman, I'm sorry for the girl; I think she wants the sympathy of all of us more than even the man. It's so awful to be the one who hurts. To hurt a man or a child!" she said in her little soft, pensive voice.

"You class us together, then?"

"Yes," said Adeline simply. "You need very much the same unselfish care and observation. And you're

both difficult. You need much faith, and hope, and charity."

Audrey patted her hand and laughed.

"But never mind," said Adeline. "Mr. Norman, keep on asking for the best they have to give. How you use it is your own affair."

"You justify and condemn us in the same breath. Perhaps I am hard on her. Having been spoilt by women, I took her too much on trust. I expected more from her than was in her."

"Oh, no!" said Adeline, looking softly into Audrey's face; "but it lay so deep down that love did not reach it. Sorrow will pierce farther. I wish," she said sadly, her eyes, in spite of her, still fixed on Audrey, "I wish her love had been great enough, and it would have known all this, and how much, much more, of its own invincible power, how everything is possible to it, how it can give its own life for the beloved, and so learn the meaning of the resurrection; and then all the bitterness of guilty sorrow would have been spared them. It seems so dreadful when the love of a woman falls short, and if it's the demand of men that makes women, keep on asking, dear Mr. Norman," she said slowly, looking always into Audrey's fascinated eyes.

Audrey was stricken dumb. The face, manner, gesture of Adeline had all altered. She was a new creature, and spoke in a strange tongue, as one with authority. But the last word spoken she shrank back, flushing miserably, in almost a convulsion of shyness. Norman stood up quickly and said good-bye, and when Audrey had done all the little needful things she went out into the frosty twilight as one half dreaming.

CHAPTER XIX

INSTEAD of taking the homeward path Audrey walked on towards the other side of the park, making half vaguely for a mossy bank on the edge of the wood, which in summer had always been warm with sunshine. Many an hour she had lain against it thinking of Larry and all the joys of their life together.

But now the sun had gone west, the shadows were long amidst the great chestnuts, the bank was damp, and the moss, an emerald in the sun, was now a cold, sad green. From the dim depths beyond came the little plaintive whimpering of the young things born that year, and who knowing only summer, protested against the approach of some vague shadow upon their gay lives. Rustling leaves fell fitfully to the ground. A mole, heavy with sleep, thrust out his nose to smell the signs of the seasons.

The beginning of the great change was in the air. A curious smell as of the approach of death floated into the consciousness of Audrey's dream. Queer, noiseless footfalls went pace by pace with hers. She paused when she had gone past the chestnuts, through a thicket of scrub oak, as far as the thorn fence where the great trees, fallen now into rhythmic line, looked out at her from stately aisles.

Here the silence was unbroken, the live things had crept out apparently after the westering sun. Even the loosening leaves paused and tightened their hold a little. To be high up in clear airs seemed suddenly the only life possible to a leaf. With the first touch of death, the spirit of life flows freer.

A shiver took Audrey. To be all alone with life still inarticulate for all its wanting and striving, it needs a gallant courage and a pure heart. She did not at all like the passionless judgment of the unhurried trees. She felt unfairly dealt by. All things seemed to be against her, even the trees which she knew in her heart to be anything but fools. She had sorted out many a puzzle under their consolatory shade and many a glimmer of reason, which out in the veiled sunshine had evaded her, came sliding down through their silver leaves. They knew all about her—the trees. She had counted them amongst her best friends, and now to be treating her like this! The flowers are well enough in one's joys, they can even share one's tears; but in the deep adventures of life it is to the trees we go. And now to be made feel awful by the trees!

She shrank from her mute observers, and yet they drew her on and on right into their heart, where a great oak kept watch. He meant goodwill, and an invitation perhaps, so in a crook of his gnarled roots she sat down at last. She was still numb and blind to all the issues that mattered. She was outside everything now—outside sorrow and joy and fear. They enveloped her, indeed she walked in them, and yet she stood outside. And all the things she saw were of another world—the little things and creatures that used once to be hers! She was a stranger in earth and sea and sky, yet nothing escaped her—craven leaves, holding on piteously to their trusty twigs, the proud and faithful ones putting on triumphantly the fine trappings of death. She saw glimpses of a cobalt sky and flashes of sunshine revealing opulent mysteries of green. A little God's cow on her white hand made her heart beat, as though that, too, were far off. It always came when she went to the wood to think of Larry. And now she was afraid of it as she was afraid of other nameless things; she put it gently on the leaf with a queer feeling of personal injury.

"I could be so happy," she said suddenly. "The most ridiculous little things would make me happy if—

if people would only leave me alone. Think of other women in this dull hole—nothing to do, nothing to think of. I haven't been at a race-meeting, or a dance, or a theatre for months; and what's my bridge to other women's? One's sole amusements—Katharine, Adeline, Andrew, a cramming shop! Goodness gracious!

"If—if things had just been a little different, if everything hadn't been against me, no one living would ever have had such a time. I could be alive all over always; I could live with my whole heart, not with mean little samples like half the people one knows. It's too bad, it's too bad, it's too bad!" said Audrey. "And now to be driven distracted by that wretched mathematician, who wants to make human beings into an exact science, as if anyone could! And Adeline, who knows nothing of anything except what I've told her! It's too ridiculous altogether. Go away, God's cow! I'm an extremely wicked woman, not fit for the society of the innocent. To give up Larry, indeed! that's what it all comes to. One would think they knew with their fiendish hints—and for the sake of the boys, too! to be foisting their responsibilities on me! Adam all over again! As if I ran their beastly show!"

Audrey, it will be seen, was growing less numb and more articulate.

"Men are all the same," she pursued; "and even mathematicians aren't very different. Give them an inch and they'll take an ell! This is the result of treating an usher like a human being. Mr. Norman seems to be steeped in middle-class limitations. To tell me to my face that I'm—oh, well!—that sort of woman practically, when it was I that made Andrew take him! And if the girl did run away, and if he did give up the appointment, there will be others when it's all blown over. Besides, anyway, it's their own business, and they've probably a good private income. And love means something, I suppose; as much as a miserable appointment, anyway, I hope, since it governs the world. And what

does anyone know about it till he loves—even the wrong person? But the less they know, the more they talk. There seem to be two sides to every question but one. And a sort of rule and compass affection for a stack of exploded virtues can't give a man much insight into anything. And Adeline—— Goodness gracious! Adeline!"

Audrey threw up her hands and laughed out into the waiting silence, and suddenly her hands returned to her lap laden with a thousand tender griefs, her wild eyes turned inwards. For lo! in a glimpse the glory and the greatness of her womanhood lay open to Audrey, and there as in a glass stood its inexorable counsel of perfection, and with her keen, clear power of perception she knew that, struggle as she might, she must in the end obey it. Not to understand, or to accept, or to attain to, but it stood above her as a judge and commanded her to obey.

Her path was clear before her, her baptism of fire the surrender of Larry!

She sat shivering on the root. She felt so small and slight to be bandied about by great cruel things with which she could not hope to cope; and, after all, what was it all about? "If only they'd leave me alone! If only they'd leave me alone!"

Audrey was driven very hard; at that moment she could have welcomed even the pain of knowing what a woman's sin means to a woman for the sake of the interpretation it brings. "As I see it," she said, "it seems so fussy, so meaningless and exaggerated, so trivial—worlds at play with a ball!"

And yet here she was trembling in the grasp of immensity and fully conscious that the whole matter was taken out of her hands.

Most women may be led into the right way by cords of silk, but others, it would seem, need the clasp of the Eternal hand of flame.

"So I must give up Larry, must I?" she said aloud,

when the intolerable compulsion had at last been lifted off her and with it had faded the sudden vision of hidden things. "Give up Larry, indeed!" The words rang in her ears, and burned in her brain, and at last drove her as with a goad up and down a green cathedral aisle, not built by hands, to run the gauntlet of innumerable alive, attentive eyes.

Could she have enjoyed one tear of contrition, one glimmer of conviction of sin, any one perquisite of the repentant, it had been less lonely, perhaps, for Mrs. Antrobus, but with nothing but unyielding trees to look at you, and unknown forces to fight against you, and irrational commands to coerce you, it is too hard on a girl. Audrey, however, fought on gallantly with the unknown, and now and then a hand would come out from the darkness and press her more deeply back into throngs of strange and illimitable forces.

She had come unconsciously to the edge of the wood unrelieved by any tag of the most ordinary morality, gamely fighting, when suddenly from the little old pepper-pot of a tower in the yard she heard the stroke of seven. The practical instinct that rarely deserted her pushed the encompassing mysteries away, and she came hurrying into the twilight of the fields, to find Mr. Norman busily engaged in teaching his terrier to make short work of rabbits. She was so lonely and baffled that she was glad to see him.

She paused for a moment to ascertain if he knew what he was about. It would have been a slight gleam of comfort to find one so accurate and full of transcendental demand, making a fool of himself, but he was plainly well up in the ways of both dogs and rabbits. "He has a fiendishly correct eye," she sighed. "If he hadn't been a first-rate army tutor, he'd have done well as a poacher."

"I suppose you do know that you're poaching," she said, when a few steps brought her within earshot. "I can't imagine your committing any sin from absence of mind like other people."

"God forbid! Don't you think an unpremeditated sin is a confession of weakness? Besides, you lose the pleasure of anticipation."

"What about the example to your pupils?"

"They're safe with Mr. Merten making hay of Virgil. They'll not poach so long as I'm about, but you can't jeopardize the future of a dog for a hollow scruple."

"What about the shooting tenant?"

"I hope he'll be grateful. I'm training the rabbits for him. Fine little chap, my dog, don't you think?"

"Very fine! What does our solitary keeper think of him?"

"He looks forward to a great future for him."

"Oh, you've squared Douse as well as your conscience?"

"A good sportsman is always a philosopher, and can be approached on that side."

"You're quite nice and tolerant to yourself and everybody else, except women."

"Tolerance from a man to a woman would mean insolence."

"Oh!"

"You couldn't be tolerant to the soldier who had the honour to carry the colours and disgraced them. You might be sorry in a way for the beggar, of course, but sorrow in such a case isn't much of a catch for the offender. If women have been chosen by universal suffrage to carry the flag they must do their job. You'd look pretty blue if we were to offer to take it from you, and we've all got to pay a price for our hereditary rights; they're generally worth it, don't you think? And, after all, yours is a royal right. A man can't understand these things; they're beyond him, as a rule, but on rare occasions, and always when Mary Mostyn happens to be about," he said with a laugh. "I believe it's worth all you've paid for it even to you. I mean, practically; theoretically it's all right, anyway. To see her flag idly flapping in the breeze would inspire any woman; but even when

she's being broken under the weight of it, her pride in the burthen must give her a courage of which we know precious little. It's never for one man or for one ideal a woman sacrifices herself; it's for the flag."

"It's a Juggernaut of a thing, and enjoys crushing bleeding bodies, and it's *always* for one man a woman sacrifices herself; and in the whole matter there's often much ado about nothing; and the self-sacrifice where no one suffers but yourself and is always being cast to the four winds does good to no one. On the contrary, it's extremely bad for other people's souls."

"That's quite likely. At the same time, you're wrong and I'm right. Ask any man who knows me if I'm a sentimentalist, Mrs. Antrobus. Meantime I'll give you my word that I'm not. I'm a mathematician with a leaning to vagrant philosophy, and with Mary Mostyn I'm only a mute one at that. Do me the justice to believe this, Mrs. Antrobus. She's a simple girl unused to idealistic jargon. She'd think I'd gone mad if I talked transcendental; but with you, Heaven alone knows why the folly, if it is folly, becomes articulate! You unlock the foolishness hidden in every man."

He turned to look at her and laughed. "It's all your fault. Only for you I should this moment be talking and thinking dog—look at him! he's well worth the most undivided attention—but I believe if you let yourself go, you'd be a rabid idealist, and there's nothing more infectious."

"I haven't infected other people," she said, after a slight pause.

"You've infected the lot of us," he said, with a sharp glance at the mute changes in her face. "We've all got to do our best with you about. This will be the most successful show in England; see if it won't."

"Its success will have nothing to do with me. I hate interfering women."

"So do I."

"Do you know," she said, with a sudden laugh, "that

I sort of made Andrew keep you, and send the other man away. It hurt Andrew in an awful way. He hadn't met you then, you know, but Mr. Frazer would have ruined the show in three months."

"I heard of his dismissal from Mr. Frazer himself. That's why I came; I wanted to see you, but there were other reasons."

"I wish you'd tell me if he ever suspected that I was behind the screen the whole time making signs to Andrew. Andrew'd never have done it but for me, and I've been haunted by a suspicion that Mr. Frazer saw me."

"He didn't see you, but he's begun to observe women in order to understand you—in your particular environment."

"Ah! that strikes everyone. They begin to wonder at once why Andrew married me."

"No man has ever wondered in regard to that, Mrs. Antrobus, not even when, being preoccupied like me, he's not in love with you. Sometimes friendship is better than love. I say, Mrs. Antrobus," he said, on an entirely unpremeditated impulse, "I wish you'd take mine, the whole of it, for what it's worth. It will be a novelty in its way—to you, at least. You must be pretty full up by this time of the other thing. Someone on the premises, not devoured by a hopeless and illicit passion, might come in useful some day."

Her face seemed to have drawn the words from him. The minute they were spoken he denied any responsibility in them.

She was silent for a minute, and he had a suspicion that her lips trembled, but she looked up at him with the old mocking defiance in her eyes.

"I'll take your friendship and thank you for it," she said. "It's the first thing of the kind a man has ever given me, and I'll value it as long as you let me keep it, and be sorry when you take it back."

"It's yours. One takes back nothing but engagement gifts."

"That depends."

"It doesn't where you are concerned. No man who had once given you his friendship would take it back."

"It does depend," she said, "and there's the last bell and I'll be late." She turned to fly to her room, then turned again. "I like your gift tremendously," she said, with the most elfish laugh he had yet heard her utter; "but if only you knew just, it's one more millstone round my neck. Thank you all the same; it's a new sensation. I've just fifteen minutes to dress in, and I'll come down without a hair astray. You look if I don't."

"I know you will. To look would imply a doubt."

"Dear me! This is startlingly new, and the way you've always been doubting me!"

"But we're friends now, and one doesn't doubt one's friends."

"Now why, in God's name, did I say that?" he asked himself as he went upstairs. "I never meant to say it. And what's up with her, I'd like to know. How much am I letting myself in for? She won't do things by halves, if she does them at all, and I'd swear to a man—not Antrobus—in any case. Anyway, I'm here if she wants me, and the ground is cleared between us. Directly she wants to use me she'll say so, and I never met a woman I'd like better to serve! If you love one woman, I believe you'd like to serve them all, which might become inconvenient in the end!"

CHAPTER XX

AUDREY was becoming confused by the constant surprise of her own actions. Meant by nature and training to be the apple for whom men contended, the queen who crowned the victor, she in whose honour all the blows were given and endured, the present state of affairs was beyond her comprehension. For a score of reasons it seemed quite peculiarly outrageous.

A woman who has always received her dues from men is nearly always gentle towards them. And although she could enjoy to the top of her bent being the centre of their contention, she could always find a deeper satisfaction to her nature in subsequently becoming a link between the combatants. There was nothing mean or niggardly in the desires of Audrey, a sense of spaciousness characterized all her points of view!

And now—now a whole world of men to be crying out for her blood! For hers! It dazed her. She might have been Jezebel herself from the persistent ferocity with which they demanded the sacrifice of her harmless person, so well disposed to all of them.

Andrew, Larry, Mr. Norman, Macmahon, and, according to Mr. Norman, every man who had ever loved a woman, were shrieking for a scapegoat in the shape of one poor woman, already fainting under a burthen of mystery from which there was no relief. And to stand alone in the darkness and fight for one's life with men, of all people in the world!

From nine-thirty p.m. to bedtime was always a lonely interval for Audrey. The boys were at preparation, the masters smoking or amusing themselves, Andrew in his laboratory, the servants in their distant quarters; and of late, to be alone with life at this hour had become extremely obnoxious to Mrs. Antrobus. For weeks she had never touched her violin, and had only made a pretence of reading. Such torment of mind as Audrey's demands stronger sedatives than a book or a fiddle. Even such innocent instruments of pleasure array themselves on the side of the enemy. All these things were against her, but it was none of them that brought her shuddering at last to her knees, crouching half defeated against the low window-seat flooded with veiled moonlight.

She had turned off the light, a small wood fire flickered out in blue flames. The night was sad and ghostly. The breath of war was upon the land, and the next day was Thursday; but of all the voices that pressed about her, all the cries that rent her heart, she now heard but one—the inexorable command of her child, her child and Larry's—at last become articulate.

"You must give yourself for him. It is his chance," said the voice. "And yours, and it is the only one. Obey! obey! obey!" said the little inflexible voice. "And see that the sacrifice is complete."

It was then that Audrey made her final decision. Against all the other commands she had protested. She had uttered cry for cry, but with this mystic whisper there was no arguing. The tension of her clenched hands loosed, her strained eyes relaxed, her wild heart went softly, her head drooped lower and lower, till she lay almost breathless in the wonderful hush, still listening for one little word of mercy.

To give up what is more than life even at the command of that which it has brought out into the light, is surely the woman's pain of pains.

But there was no mercy in the voice, nothing but everlasting love.

"You must give yourself," it said, "and the sacrifice must be complete."

But even now she listened, hoping to the last with a great courage. Then slowly she sighed, gathered herself up and filled the room with light.

"And my next move," she said, kneeling down to build up the fire; "whatever it is, it must, it stands to sense, scatter pain broadcast.

"Oh, not to-night! I can't tell Andrew to-night," she cried, skrinking and shivering; "but—I must—just find out a little how much he'll mind. Perhaps—perhaps —after all he's only Andrew."

This was consolatory. She leaned nearer to the leaping flames and tried to get warmer.

"But I wish—I wish I could spare even Andrew," she said. "I could. He need never know. It's my secret and Larry's—but, but I have to," she said, her breath coming more quickly. "It's not my affair any longer. I have to tell the whole truth or none."

"I can spare no one," she cried passionately, "and—and nothing has been spared me."

She stood up at last and threw the wrap she had worn in the garden over her shoulders. "The sacrifice will be very complete; no one need be the least anxious," she said, brooding over the fire. "Everybody's going to be sacrificed, so far as I can see."

"I wasn't born to be a bringer of pain," she moaned. "If I could only die! instead of this—and this is only the beginning."

She sat down again, too cold to move, but the fire did not warm her. So she drew her wrap more closely and went down to Andrew.

More than once in the last few weeks she had come in upon him lightly, like a moonbeam, and through his most abstruse calculations one little atom of Andrew was now always listening for the footfall of his wife.

She looked very slender and ethereal in the ample folds of her rich cloak. A most unusual sense of responsibility

took hold of Andrew. He felt sure that she was in need of something that he could give, but if only he had the remotest conception in what it consisted! In his bewildered concern he pushed a wretchedly uncomfortable armchair in her direction, took off his working glasses, and peered at her with mute, inquiring distress. He would have given worlds had Audrey afforded him some little clue even to the more simple parts of her perfect being, for most passionately did he desire to serve her. But before the exquisite rarity of her soul his diffidence only grew with intimacy. She was as a shrine which grows always more holy as man draws more near.

What now looked out at him from her matchless eyes caused Andrew to come very near praying for light whereby to decipher this mystery of godliness who was his alone. But failing speech too high for him, the spell of silence was the only setting sufficiently fine for Audrey. So he sat, and in mute devotion gazed at her, till in the end the sprite in Audrey broke into a laugh.

"Oh, Andrew, don't!" she entreated. "For goodness' sake, don't! Say something—anything! the commonest little thing that occurs to you will suit me the best. I'm not the least what your eyes swear that I am. Oh! Andrew, sometimes your eyes take the solemnest oaths. You might be swearing on the Bible, and it's—it's so frightfully funny." She paused to laugh unsteadily.

"Staring through microscopes at insects ought to give people more correct views of human beings. I shouldn't be half so much surprised at the inaccuracy of your observations if you were an astronomer always staring at stars through telescopes, but a man used to the ways of worms!"

"They have very fine and delicate ways, dearest. They make a man fastidious, I think."

"You oughtn't to be in any sort of way an idealist, Andrew," she said, with a little passionate laughing ring in her voice, "when you don't believe in a proper God."

"But I believe in a worm," he said with an odd smile. "I wonder wherein the initial difference lies."

"You look through the worm at something else, just as you always look through me. It makes you extremely difficult, Andrew. I—I wish you wouldn't."

Of a sudden the red ran up into her face and down into the whiteness of her neck, and she turned from him with a quick movement and huddled down into the shadows of her purple cloak.

"Life would be a poor business if one didn't, dearest, and I a duller man than even I am. We must all in our differing degree be always looking for our own particular *sang réal*.

"The pity is," he added, with vague inquiry again in his eyes, "that in our hot pursuit of our own quarry we forget the hosts of others equally absorbed in their schemes, and in the end we become unspeakable bores to those who do not happen to be members of our own little hunt."

"You're not a bore," she said quickly.

"I've often bored *you*."

"Not for months and months. When you did, it was my fault, not yours."

"It's been your misfortune, child, and mine. A creature of flame and fire and dew was never made to be hampered by any obstacle so inevitable as such a husband as myself."

"Andrew! do talk sense!"

He stood up and came closer, and looked shyly down at her.

"I have noticed that you get the best out of the most unpromising material, Audrey. We have all noticed it, child. You have never taken me seriously in hand. Couldn't you begin to do so? You might make something—you might make even what you want out of me, I think, dearest. My faith in your capacity is measureless, dear little girl——" He reddened and hesitated. "I—in the end—I might make you happy, Audrey."

There was a light in his eyes—a fatal light she well knew, and in his voice a tone.

"My usual luck!" said Audrey in the silence of her soul. "My usual luck!"

She wound her hands tightly round her trembling knees, and tried to control her swaying senses, to beat down the wave of pain that would swallow and choke her.

"My usual luck," she said.

For an instant she could not speak or think; she could do nothing but let Andrew, with his new look, become mirrored in her memory. The real Andrew she had never met to come out at last to claim her, and now—now!

She knew all the ways of love; she had learnt in a good school. And Andrew, as young as his years to an hour, stood waiting for his leap into the heart of a new world. And to-morrow—to-morrow, his eyes would be opened and he would see!

"Andrew," she said in desperation, "I wish you'd always go without glasses. You look—so different, so much more easy. If you'd go on like this you'd quite soon be adapted to the simplest understanding."

"That's not a reply to my question."

"What question?"

"Will you take me in hand seriously? Not as an experiment, Audrey, as heretofore"—he paused and laughed, and the light in his eyes grew as keen as a knife—"an experiment in an unknown force with some claims to intelligence, but in the way in which you deal with the boys, and make of me what you will. It will, I know, be the best of which I am capable."

He drew her eyes to his. She was forced to look at him. And every sign and portent of the awakening of a man to the fullness of life was patent to her expert vision.

There was a marvel of pathos, a marvel of dignity about Audrey, as she stood up and drew her cloak around her. He never forgot her as she looked then, but as her perfect

face bent towards him, lightly like a flower, it was a-quiver with mockery—the tragic mockery of a wandering soul.

"I'm going up to town in the morning," she said. "Ask me that question again in the evening. Good-night."

Had he known how to speak to a woman, or to touch her, he would have followed her; but being only on the eve of his awakening, he was fully aware of nothing but his own impotence.

That night he did but little work and did not sleep at all.

CHAPTER XXI

LARRY had taken a new flat in a new neighbourhood, and had made it very sweet and fresh and fragrant, as perfect a setting for a woman's life as the heart of woman could desire. There were few busier men now in London than Larry, and his work was absorbing; but taught by love, he forgot nothing. Love and light and joy and hope lived in the pleasant rooms.

Even Audrey, who knew him as no one else did, and expected always their best even from the meanest, was mute with surprise and delight and expectation, stabbed to the heart with mortal pain.

She went from room to room without a word to say good-bye to all her joys. The least little thing she touched seemed to her like a dead child upon whom the coffin lid was just about to close. As last she threw herself into a low chair before the fire.

"Well," said Larry, too happy and excited to know of any condition save that of beatitude, "what do you think of it?"

"The whole place is just alive with love and hope and joy, and the passion of living. I—I didn't know till this minute what love meant, or life, or—or anything," she said.

"Audrey! What's up with you?"

"N—Nothing; but you can give me some wine, or tea, or—or something, if you like."

She lay still for a few minutes, while Larry took care of her, and even then she noticed the unhurried common sense in all his proceedings.

"You'd have lost your head a month ago, Larry," she

said presently. "You were only a boy then; you're a man now. You've grown up in a month. Oh, Larry! you'll be a great soldier. And, Larry," she said very slowly, "I love you so awfully much, dear, that—that I'm going to give you up."

"Drink your wine, Audrey, and don't be a fool." She finished it and gave him the glass.

"Now you'd better lie down."

"No; I'm all right again, but I'm not well enough for useless fusses—and I'm too tired to argue; do please remember that. I want to settle things in the quickest possible way and get done. And, Larry, I'm under orders, and I've got to obey and so've you."

She huddled down lower into her chair and put her hand up to shade her face. "And my C.O. is our child, Larry—yours and mine—and last night it simply told me I must give you up—that it's your one chance and mine."

"Audrey, for Heaven's sake stop."

"It said," she persisted—"I heard it quite distinctly—you don't think I'm inventing this!—it said that the sacrifice must be complete. I was neither ill nor mad," she said passionately; "that's what it said; and also that I must tell the whole truth to everybody and spare nobody. And when I love you so!" she moaned. "When I know—this room has shown me things that I'd only dreamed of before."

Larry knew too much of men by this time not to have learnt a little of women. From the instant she began to speak he saw the deadly sincerity of Audrey and her mortal pain. Despair pierced like iron into his heart, but he soon thrust that out. He was too young yet for despair, and she wanted all the reason he had at his command.

He put a strong force upon himself, knelt down beside her and drew her little head down to him.

"Fortunately for both our sakes," he said quietly, "I have a voice in this matter now."

"No," she said. "Neither of us has any voice any longer. It's the child's voice now, and we've just got to obey it——"

"Things have gone too far."

"Oh, Larry! what's the use—when you know they haven't." She drew herself out of his arms and looked at him.

"Larry, you know enough of me by this time, I hope, to know when I mean things; to be quite sure, anyway, that I wouldn't come here—here to you, to make a scene, or a fool of either of us, or to be persuaded, or——" Her eyes were full of an odd light, her face was white, but not a muscle moved; her purpose, it was plain, was as immovable.

Larry sighed restively.

"You wouldn't care for me in the way you do now," she said steadily; "it's quite different from the first way, and I'm glad it is—I'm glad, Larry, even now—but you wouldn't care for me in this way if you thought for a minute I was making a woman's fuss in all this, and didn't mean to do as—the child said."

"Audrey! you to talk like this!"

"It does sound funny, doesn't it?" She pushed back her hair, frowning. "I don't know anything about sin. It's not that. I don't feel sinful: sin's a sort of thing that has never interested me; it's a depressing subject; but if you've got to do a thing, you've got to, that's all."

"Don't look like that, Audrey; don't speak like that. You can't expect a man to stand that sort of change in a woman when he's been the cause of it. My God! but when I think that that day should bring forth this——"

She laughed in rather a dreadful way.

"It's the wages of sin, Larry—it's the old story; it's like a tract. But, anyway, if we're sinners, we're doing our level best to square everything, you and I; we're giving up everything. We're paying the uttermost farthing: a devil couldn't want more than that. Oh!

it ought to be enough," she sobbed in the extremity of her anguish. "There ought to be nothing now to come between you and your chance when we've given up everything. If God wants more," she said wildly, "I'll never look at a flower again, or touch a child; and, Larry, I'll kill yours."

Words were worse than useless; he hid her poor face in his arms.

"If you do this—if you're mad enough," he said at last, "do you mean to say you'll tell Antrobus—everything?"

For a minute or two she lay against him trembling; then she sprang from the enchantment of his caresses and went, swaying a little, to the window. She opened it wide and stood leaning against the wall.

"I have to," she said at last. "I couldn't live in his house and eat his bread, and be deceiving him all the time. And I'd like to know what you'd think of me if I didn't. Andrew's no more than a child himself. You can't tell lies to children, and keep on telling them perhaps for eighty years. Sinners and scientists live for ever, and once I begin again I'll go on. *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.*"

"Audrey! For God's sake——!"

"It's the most bewildering—what's the word?" she said; "I saw it somewhere in a book—counsel of perfection I ever struck. Don't stand staring like that, Larry. It's not my affair, you know it's not. I'm under orders. And it's our last day together. Can't you help me? Can't you touch me or do something? When—when—to-night when I go home, I'll tell Andrew everything."

"My God! How'll he take it?"

"Like a gentleman of a past age," she said slowly. "Andrew is curious. It will change his life now; it wouldn't a month ago. Everything's been against me. He'll be very good to me. He'll take care of me, but he doesn't know anything about—anything. He divides

women into angels and school marms, and nebulous mysteries which strike men dumb, and with madness, and don't concern women—and he puts me on the side of the angels. Oh, Larry! Larry! Larry! how shall I live? How on earth shall I live? And I can't die—not until I know you've taken your chance, anyway! I wish I could have hysterics or something," she said, coming back to the fire. "They must be so comforting on occasions like this, and they'd give you something to do, Larry; you look as if you'd be the better of some honest labour."

She dropped down in a chair, and the two sat in the throbbing silence. The hand stretched out to Larry burnt and froze him. In his heart he knew that the game was up; but with his reason strong and sane from recent use, he was preparing a final sortie, treading down, too, the brute of passion, now no longer a shadowy thing safe in the background. He was, to be sure, hard set that day in late September, in thrall to a score of considerations, and passion, rich and warm, and in the fullness of its youth, tore at his heart.

But there were other things to reckon with—pain, bitter disappointment, pride—the obligation, the sense of honour common to decent men, that was put upon him.

It was their last chance from another point of view from this insensate one of Audrey's. If she went now, it would be for ever. He loved her wholly; his love had followed all the windings of her strange unfoldment, and had grown with it in depth and greatness—grown, also, in warm human passion. He wanted the whole of Audrey. By the strongest of all rights—the right of possession—she was his already, and a man will not lightly hand back his own to one who has never had it.

He was perfectly level-headed. He knew even in the transmuting grip of love and passion all that her sacrifice might mean to him. It would clear every obstacle from his path. Nothing need now come between him and the best in life. He was free to take all his magnificent

chances. She was uninjured in the eyes of the world, and no power on earth or in heaven could rob him of her love. An illimitable future lay ahead of both of them, for she was safe in the hands of her husband. And even for that he half despised Andrew.

The eternal contempt of the concrete man for the abstract one was part of the make-up of Larry, and once he had got over the shock of the years, of the actual sum of the years of Antrobus, nothing could make him realize his rival as anything but aged and infirm, a creature to be sorry for, but not seriously to consider. He regarded him, in short, as Audrey had once done. He was a safe guardian for Audrey, however; that was the essential thing; and a little waiting full of hope seems nothing on the eve of a great chance.

There were salient advantages to himself in the beautiful self-surrender of Audrey. But he looked at her, he touched her; the scent of her rippling hair made him too human for ultimate ambition. It was Audrey herself he wanted—now; the present joy and hope and ravishment that were all his, her faults and frailties, her marvels of warm allurement, her exquisite, measureless love.

He wanted no star to worship or regret, but the woman who was his! his! his! The triumphant note of possession rang in his mad heart. The pride of the victor stirred in him the pulses of expectation. What would anything be without Audrey—so intimately a part of everything? Without her the world were cold, no matter what his chance or his manner of taking it. Without her for the crown of victory, what did it all amount to, after all? As for sacrifice, he would be sacrificing something too—a good deal, as it happened—and "Let that count!" he said aloud.

As he watched her in the flame-lit gloom the passion of self-sacrifice ran rampant in Larry. For a moment he might have been a woman, but soon he was a man again, torn and tormented by a passion ingrained in man by

nature, and in the woman by the man, and now he was more ready than ever to sacrifice everything and everybody for Audrey—Audrey now meaning himself.

And Audrey knew all the symptoms. She saw his self-control ebbing with the recoil of a spring tide, bearing down every resolution, obscuring reason. And as the fever of passion thrilled in the veins of the man, enlarging his senses, some cool flow of which she had no knowledge suddenly came pouring through Audrey. She was alive, alert with a strange new life, buttressed by a courage keener and more daring than her own, and all those impulses to run to the help of helpless things that all these weeks had so tormented her, all ran out now to Larry. For an instant she lay motionless in his tightening arms. She held her breath under the panting of his; the scent of the roses brought out by the fire confused her like wine. She sighed, collected her senses, and the strength with which she pushed him from her was not power but gentleness. She stood up white and steady, steady enough to laugh lightly and turn on the light.

"And now," she said, seeing for all she hardly dared to see his disordered face, the lurid light in his sunken, hot eyes, the pitiful defeat in his shrunken figure, "couldn't we have tea? It's early, but still—and move this screen; it's stuffy. And then with the frosty air coming in behind us, the lovely fire—and oh, Larry! put the three rose-bowls on the table; it'll be perfect. You've made the room mine—me! I shall always keep it just as it is, somewhere in a dream.

"That's right. Sit there, Larry! That's your chair, and we've lived a whole long life, we two, on just such evenings as this, with the thousand other things that belong to us, somewhere. And now ring for tea, and we'll have the nicest tea; it will be my send-off to you, Larry. A soldier always expects a send-off when he goes to the wars. I'll see you once more, of course. I'll go down to the ship. I'll tell Andrew that at once, so that there can be no mistake."

"I wonder which of us is mad—I to allow you to do this insensate thing, or you to do it?"

"I think we're both completely sane, and that that's what's wrong with us. Maniacs live lightly on illusions, and we're gorging ourselves on facts."

Audrey went to the window.

The flat was in a quiet court. The roar of the city came to their ears like a distant murmur. A baby cried in the street; the bell of a muffin man went tingling down the walk; a butcher's boy at an area door played sadly on a jews' harp.

The little homely sounds of the uneventful lives of God-fearing people filled Audrey with a fierce passion of pain. Two women, oozing bridge from every pore, hurried on tapping high heels to a party.

"I know her," said Audrey, "the nearest one. I once won five pounds from her, and she looked like a glittering snake when she paid it. She belongs to a Rescue Society and lectures Magdalens. She's very modest and always alludes to them as 'they,' and quotes things out of the Bible about them in the thinnest voice you ever heard. She'd give her eyes to be at *me*."

"Don't, darling!"

"Goodness gracious! but I wish she had *my* job!"

"What does that girl think?" she asked, when the maid had gone. "What lie have you invented?"

"She thinks that you're my wife, of course," he said jerkily; "come up to see me off, and stay in town for distraction when I'm gone. My own man is on leave. He has never been here, and will join me at the ship."

"You must change the programme a little, Larry. Say that I find the consolatory presence of my dearest relations necessary just now, and put the servants on board wages for the moment. Afterwards, I'll be going to travel, and they can disperse. Arrange it all on account of my state of health. So much for propriety! That golden flame makes a sort of halo of glory around your brow, Larry. I think it's prophetic. Larry, eat something!

This is my party, and you're rather rude sitting there like a stuffed image. You require nourishment. You'll need all your strength for what's coming, every atom of every sort of strength and courage you have, or what'll become of me at home with Andrew? I'll know—I'll know everything about you, Larry," she said, the wild light leaping up in her eyes. "And you need never tell me when you've forgotten me. I'll know that."

"You'll never know it," he said. The suffocating wrath of passion made words difficult to him.

"I wonder—with a whole free life before you! But until you give up caring for me, I wish you'd keep all these things. You could let the flat, of course, but I'd like you to have these to come home to. They're the only things we'll ever be likely to have together.

"If I were good I daresay I'd be asking you to sell them all by auction, and bury your wicked past; but one can't bury anything so full of life at a moment's notice. You can't murder things for righteousness' sake; it's—it's bad enough to let them die, and when they're dead—when everything is dead, your past and all, sell them for a charity; choose some Home for Fallen Sisters, Larry, for remembrance——"

Words were useless, so he kissed her into a momentary silence, but words were now the only refuge of Audrey; she got free again and laughed.

"Don't give them to any other woman, that's all I ask. I couldn't bear that. I'd haunt you both. No other woman must ever share these things. They're mine—me, even when you've forgotten me. Failing the home for fallen sisters, couldn't you burn them?"

"Audrey, have you no mercy on yourself or on me?"

"Mercy—I don't know. There's not very much of 'the gentle dew from heaven' in the present situation. It doesn't make you feel weakly amiable in any sort of way. It makes you want the most enormous things from other people. Nothing less than the biggest will satisfy me so far as you're concerned, or I'll feel like a common

creature who steals the manhood of men, and whom people rescue when they're not playing bridge. Oh, Larry! I'm glad it's your country that's taking you from me; not a woman. I couldn't stand that; that would be the limit."

She took his cup and brought it back to him. She stooped, and slowly, lingeringly, she laid her head on his shoulder, and touched his hair and his forehead and his mouth.

"I'm just seeing if I could give you back to a woman," she said, standing up and trembling, as she always trembled now when Larry's arm was round her.

"I couldn't; nothing would induce me. No one but one of Andrew's unsubstantial saints could do it—and no credit to *her*!"

"You're as white as paper," said Larry. "Your eyes are sunk in your head. The only live thing about you is your hair. You're nothing but a woman on her beam ends, whom no one but a man could ever take care of. Don't move," he said, holding her tight. "You're mine. You've never been anyone's but mine, and you never can be. It's not in nature. You're mine by ties that neither of us can break," his voice was steady and low, his eyes hard and relentless. "Can't you see the unfairness of the whole thing? the insolence of your attitude?" he said hoarsely. "You've already sacrificed everything for me in one way, and now you want to do it in another; everything to be sacrificed to me! It's too big an order even for a man. I'm the only one of all concerned, can't you see, who'll come off scot-free in public opinion, and have as decent an environment as man could wish," he said bitterly, "for the cure of a broken heart, or whatever you may choose to call it. Antrobus must have it out teaching unlicked cubs, and you—my God! Audrey, it's too much," he said, straining her to him with brutal force. "If it's not a case of a man sheltering behind a woman's petticoats, I'd like to know what is. Child! Can't you see? You talk of giving me back my freedom, my manhood; but, by

God! you're robbing me of both—of all the rights of a man."

She lay motionless in his arms fighting the hardest battle of all. She was aflame with passion, weak with love, worn from sleepless nights, unfit physically, mentally unbraced for strife like this, with no conviction of sin whatsoever, and all that she had ever wanted lay in the warm circle of Larry's arms. She nearly gave in to the wild rapture of love.

"Yes! yes! yes!" cried out the whole of her sentient being. All nature was on her side, generations of Art; in one rhythmic voice of triumph they were both pleading her cause, for love is all and hell is nothing until the spirit wakes, to hearts great enough to pay the price, as these two were; but the tiny voice said, "No"—like a fairy bell it said it—"No! no! no!" said the little voice, and it spoke with the inexorable gentleness of God.

Larry must have seen some vision clear enough even to his understanding in her eyes as she lifted them to him, for in an instant she was sacred to him. He put her tenderly down on her chair and the fight was at an end.

"At least, I can do something," he said, after a long silence; "and you can obey in something, little as you believe in obedience. I'll make fresh tea, and I'll ring for bread, and you'll make some toast at that fire. I've never seen you making toast; perhaps you can't; but I seem to see you making toast somewhere by some wood fire, and you must make it for once by ours!"

"I've made heaps of toast—beautifully."

"I know; I can see you. You'd be roasting chestnuts if it was two months later. You'll be roasting them for the boys. It's partly for those boys you've thrown me over, Audrey."

Audrey looked out at him as though from some vast dim vision.

"I think it's because you were a boy once, like them," she said.

So she made toast, and Larry buttered it as lavishly as

he had done at Sandhurst, and they drank the fresh-made tea, and courageous laughter more sad than tears broke out between them. They were children together before the bright fire for one little hour, and then a shrill call from the telephone brought Larry with flashing eyes to his feet.

He came back more slowly than he had gone, and now his eyes were smouldering fires, half quenched.

He put his hand on Audrey's shoulder.

"It's come," he said. "We sail on Friday."

"Friday! I—I—must hurry home," she said, not knowing why she said it.

"I'm a selfish beast," she cried in a moment, "to think of myself first now, but I'm glad, Larry; I *am* glad. You know I am in my heart, but oneself always slips in first somehow. We'll keep on pretending to the last," she said suddenly. "This is ours—all this," she said, and gathered everything in with a quick move of her arms. "We've lived here together for years, so come to my room and do all the little things you'd be sure to do in a little place like this, where we'd be free and do what we like."

He followed her nervously with abashed eyes. He was phenomenally clumsy.

"Not that! Oh, Larry, I'd expected better things from you! And now fix my veil. Ah!" she cried, refusing to notice his shaking hands, his twitching face, "you're hopeless as a maid. You must learn adaptability, or you'll never be a Field-Marshal. And now, my coat—that's my fur, stupid—and oh, Larry!" she said, standing up proudly and looking confidently into his face, "this is the prettiest of all the rooms; you might have been a woman from the way you thought it out. It's just home. I'll be always a stranger and a sojourner in any other room now till the end of my life."

"Home!" he said, in a voice which was almost a groan "Oh, come!

"And we'll have one more five minutes by the fire. I told Horner to be at my club at five-thirty"

"You're not as adaptable as you might be in new conditions, Larry," she said, as they looked together into the fire. "But what a soldier you'll be! And I'm glad you were good till you knew me—you were good, Larry, weren't you? It never struck me before, but now I'd like to be sure. I know really, but——"

"I was right enough, no thanks to me. I never wanted anyone but you."

"I'm most frightfully glad." She nestled closer to him.

"Perhaps I might have wondered some day when you couldn't tell me this, and it might have made things a little bit different. Rather ridiculous, don't you think, considering all things?"

"Oh, Audrey, even now——"

"But you're just the same. You're glad I was good, in a mild way. Larry! say you are?"

"You'd better go," he said, breathing hard. "I can't stand much more of this. Good! Good! You're too good for me. You ask too much of a man."

"I ask no more than you can give," she said. Sorrow had dried up all her tears; she trembled no longer. Her face was full of pride and courage. "How could I love you as I do if—I—I wasn't sure of you in all circumstances—if I couldn't ask all you've got to give this last time together. I don't understand your fight as well as my own, but we've stood together under fire, you and I, and we're comrades from now on in everything. Oh, Larry! if we're rank bad sinners, anyway we're right good soldiers. Oh! Good-bye! Good-bye! I'll come to the ship, but this is good-bye. You must come with me to the car for the maid's sake, and don't moon about here. Spend your evening with soldiers or read tactics, or tell the War Office what you think of it, and never forget that I'm a soldier too," she said.

She walked out before him with the fine unruffled serenity of a young queen

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN she got home Audrey found Mr. Norman and Andrew in perplexed conclave in the hall. So absorbed were they, that at first they did not notice her; but when they did the look of profound relief on both their faces shrewdly stabbed her, but she spoke lightly.

"What on earth is the matter?"

"Macmahon, of course," said Norman; in the immensity of his relief Andrew was stricken dumb. "You couldn't suppose it to be anyone else, since time means everything to him and us just now. He's supposed to be starting an attack of diphtheria or something."

"Yes; and what else?"

"He's in the lap of luxury, and not bad at all; but that sort of chap easily takes fright, and he's got some sin on his conscience, no doubt, and wants to see *you*. Nothing less will content him."

"It's impossible!" said Andrew hurriedly.

"Why?" said Audrey; "I can have a bath afterwards and change my clothes."

"You're tired," said Andrew. "It's an immense risk; Dr. Lambert forbids it. He must be kept in complete isolation until we know. It's not as though the boy were in any danger." Andrew's face, as he watched her, was half apprehensive, half expectant. She looked very white and fragile this evening, a little ghostly and ethereal; a superstitious thrill of foreboding disturbed his mind.

"There must be some danger about, don't you think?"

she said, " or Macmahon wouldn't be so anxious about his sins. It's sure to be sins, and there's no one he could confess to but me—not Dr. Lambert's nurse, I'm certain ! I've seen her, and no boy living could confess a sin to a mathematical genius," she said with an elfish laugh. " It wants a woman to receive the confession of a boy."

Mr. Norman noticed queer things going on in her in a flash. Andrew saw nothing but two dear eyes full of radiant light.

" Don't wait dinner," she said ; " I'll be in for the *entrée*, and I'll be frightfully careful. I know all about infection, and—I—I had a good tea."

" There is a risk, we all know it," said Andrew, turning with shy dignity to the other man ; " but I felt sure that Mrs. Antrobus would take it."

" One would be sure, naturally. I'm glad she's gone to the lad. He's a rank bad case ; I'd be sorry in the end to be balked by him, and I hope Mrs. Antrobus will save us from that humiliation."

Andrew's mind was wandering off after his winged wife.

" I beg your pardon, Mr. Norman—I—I gather that you are not alluding to the danger of infection."

" No, I'm alluding to the far more probable danger of Macmahon's being plucked for Sandhurst, his last chance, and getting us blamed, by an illness complicated with untimely and irrational repentance. I wonder what he's done over and above what he's been doing for some days under my very nose. He can't even crib intelligently ; he has all the sinuosity of the fool of a clever family, and all his stiff-necked, wrong-headed conceit built up on a rotten foundation of morbid humility. If a fellow has always got less than his dues he's as conceited as an ape and as devoid of self-respect. I have no doubt he's been up to something that badly wants absolution, and that the working of his chaotic wisp of a mind has a lot to do with his high temperature. They're morbid in every way, those chaps."

" Ah, Mr. Norman ! " said Andrew, with real concern,

"I am sorry you feel in that way about the boy. His brain is still a fortress to be subjugated, I fear, and the choice of tactics for its subjugation seems to present great difficulties; and even when gained, it will not hold much that one could desire," sighed Andrew. "Still, the conquest of any enemy is beginning to have its pleasures for me. And Mrs. Antrobus likes the boy."

"So do I—but he needn't have played us this trick just now. He'll put us back for months, and his family is too charged with pure intellect to have either insight or mercy. We'll be having letters in the academic style, and very likely the aunt who let him loose with the lady's dress-case in tow. His male belongings have affairs of moment to attend to. They'll sit tight."

"I'm sorry for the lad," said Andrew quietly.

"So am I, when he doesn't upset my calculations and make hay of dates. I wonder what he's done!"

"Mrs. Antrobus will, no doubt, ascertain, and also undertake the aunt," said Andrew with a view to consolation. The genuine professional ardour of his colleagues was a characteristic he greatly valued, but for the moment he himself could only pretend to the stirrings within him of the lesser humanities.

In the press of the new life there was coming into the apperceiving mass of Andrew's economy a most perplexing change; there was a loosening of old centres, a gathering in of new, and slipping in and out of the winding of his expanding thought went always Audrey—laughing, eluding, mystifying—and leading him on and on to some beckoning glory of light, to some deeper deeps of life, and summer, and love, and understanding, than those he had yet plumbed.

Without doubt he stood upon the verge of some wonderful awakening. His soul reached out towards it with sure expectation; his whole being was alert for the dawn.

It was only in respect to the next step, that little step so difficult in our limited measure of our limitless powers, that Andrew now experienced any poignant motion of

humility. The old order was indeed passing! With Audrey for guide, from henceforth the stoniest path upward would, to be sure, be the jewelled way of a king.

Meanwhile, Audrey was sitting beside Macmahon, helping him to disburthen himself of his secret at the least possible hurt to his throat.

His general position amongst his kind had filled this great hulking fellow with many of the silly shames of an anæmic girl, and a charge of malingering justified by fact at the beginning of his cramming career, which had exposed him to the grinning and indelicate ragging of the rest, had now kept him silent about his sufferings. He had never before had a serious illness, and the aching discomfort of the last few days had been a revelation of the devil to him. An unpleasant sort of a reminder that he'd better buck up and mend his ways, and the devil, in his steaming hot and clammy cold meditations, had got himself largely mixed up with Mrs. Antrobus. The premonitory symptoms of a diphtheritic attack, in short, had raked the soul of Macmahon in a way the birch-rod of half a dozen schools had failed to do.

Tweaks and twinges of pain, alien and unearned, confounded him. No boy could bear a straightforward caning with more courage and equanimity than Macmahon. Canings had lost all moral significance for him, and his skin was tough and seasoned. Even in the matter of birchings, God—or is it, perhaps, the devil—will temper the wind to the shorn lamb, but this insidious attack of invincible red-hot pincers upon his shrinking flesh took the heart out of him.

In order to please Mrs. Antrobus, and get the better of the other "chaps," and his own inexplicable and mounting ineffectuality, he had, for several days past, been cribbing right and left, legally and illegally. Even in the matter of cribbing there is a wide-minded code of honour, which must be rigorously adhered to, and Macmahon, in his frenzied despair, broke every article of it, not caring a rap for any consequence. His mind was in ferment;

he had grown too numb with snubbing to be moved by the piercing shafts of Mr. Norman's wit; his promises to Mrs. Antrobus were fast fading, and yet the insensate desire to please her urged him forward on his nefarious course.

Perhaps Macmahon was too dense to be stabbed to life by anything less brutal than diphtheria. Possibly he needed inspiration of the battering-ram order. At any rate, he was getting it.

He was worse than was supposed, in great pain and dire despair. All the religion of which he had ever been capable was centred round a dumb devil, who had of a sudden become articulate. He was the most unhappy lad in England, as lashed by the relentless whip of fear he lay, looking phenomenally ugly, on the bed, but duplicity was at an end. In no sort of way did he finesse in regard to his confession. He jerked it out in spasms.

It was a matter of the meanest, an ugly little snake of a sin which made Audrey's sad, steady mouth quiver; but she only said, very quietly:

"Oh, well, that's all done with. What you've got to do now is to leave it behind you with all the other miserable sad things, and to begin again. You'll never get better in body or mind if you lie there hugging those vile little things closer, instead of simply walking away from them. You might as well expect peace and comfort with an adder in your bed as with your sins. And never mind about the promises you made and broke. You poor thing!" she murmured, with an irrepressible burst of unregenerate humanity; "you made them by moonlight, and that was a radical mistake, and it was for me to see that you repeated them by daylight; but I've been busy—I've had very pressing affairs of my own."

His face was drawn with some vague pain, yet vague as it was it tormented him even worse than his aches. A dreadful darkness was about the miserable, mean lad. The inexorable Hand, so full of tenderness, pressed sore at this moment upon two poor sinners.

The pathos of the swollen, hideous face pierced deep into the more experienced of the two, right into the heart of love that lies behind all sin and all experience, and for full five minutes Audrey was the Audrey of whom God had never lost sight. For where, in God's name, would any of us be if He but for one instant lost touch with the least of His little ideals of life.

For Audrey, she said very little; it is only in the silence when the spirit becomes articulate that our speech is made perfect, and the neighbourhood of death, even in the darkness of ignorance, opens the eyes. The few words which Audrey, not understanding, did speak to the boy, he understood, and those she never uttered he understood even better.

"I know now," he said at last, moving weakly under her hand. "I wish I needn't die. I'd like——"

He didn't say what he'd like, but Audrey knew perhaps.

"You'll not die," she said, "if I can help it. But even if you do, it'll be all right—I'm sure it will—I'm quite perfectly sure," she added. "So take it just as it comes. But keep on all the time wanting to get well. Don't give in—never give in—and then don't bother in the end even if you've got to, and can't get well. It's better to get well, but it's all right, anyway. It's all quite simple, really," she said after a pause, touching his forehead curiously. "But remember, dear, that *I* want you to get well. I can't tell you how much I want you to get well, lad," she said slowly with a strange face.

"I'll want you, I think, all my life. We've come so close, in so queer a way, that I think we'll always want each other—you and I. However it goes, we'll always be pals, but I'd rather you were alive. It's so much more natural and cosy to have you about the house as flesh and blood, making up to all of us for your foolishness. You'd be doing it all right somewhere else, of course, and I'd know—I'd feel you were—but one likes homely things.

"I have rather a horrid thing to do to-night," she said with another wistful touch; "I wish a bit of you could come with me—for—confidence. I'll often want you now, Macmahon, so you must do your level best to live. To desert me now would be the meanest act of your whole life. So just do your best, and then if you fail, no one can blame you. Now you know what you've got to do, so now I'll go."

The boy lay silent. Words matter so little when death is creeping up your throat, and swift on its track the mounting battle-cry of life.

She met the doctor at the door.

"He's extremely ill," she said. "You'll have a big fight this time, Dr. Lambert."

"But, Mrs. Antrobus——"

"I don't pretend to know anything at all about illness, but I felt death at my elbow five minutes ago, and the boy saw him. I don't want that boy to die—and what I want I generally get, Dr. Lambert," she said laughing.

"I can quite believe it, Mrs. Antrobus; but what business have you here? I gave orders——"

"I know; and I broke them, and I'm sorry! I'm not insubordinate, really, but he sent for me, and I had to go, and I've taken every precaution. I'm not the least silly, and you ought to know that by this time."

"I do know it—but I have my reputation to consider and your health."

"They're both invulnerable. It's the greatest comfort to me to know that you have all those letters after your name. In this household we acquire a respect for these things, and it would be an awful humiliation for the whole staff if the boy died now they've all been concentrating their minds on him, so far with precious little success, but I've backed him from the beginning. And, oh, well! he's got to live!"

"I'll do my best."

"And you'll let me have a finger in the pie?"

He laughed.

"You'd better give in with a good grace," she said, "for you'll find you can't do without me in the end."

"I quite believe that."

"After this I'll obey every order, but to-night I must do what I like."

"Anything you like, Mrs. Antrobus, must be charming."

"I hope you'll find it so!"

"I'm sure the boy will. Go and change, and eat a good dinner, and I'll send you word what I think of the patient."

"You'll think just as I do when you see him," said Audrey airily.

That dinner, half over when she came in, was always afterwards a fantastic dream to Audrey. Andrew's clear-cut features, his far-away eyes so full of trust and simple depths of knowledge. Andrew of the single eye, to whom she represented Heaven!

Mr. Norman's rough, heavy, massive head, his keen searching eyes, which knew too much of her ever to associate her with anything but the pleasant earth. Forrester, the classical man—a fine intellectual machine, who admired her wit and enjoyed her dinners, and made it a rule never to speculate on women. The varying faces of the boys plainly obsessed by their food, yet each ringing up his higher part, so to speak, in the vain endeavour to look pensive in view of her mission of mercy to a comrade in distress, and the manner in which both mood and dress became her.

Upon an impulse of wild audacity she had put on the youngest of her many frocks, the whitest and the most virginly innocent, a thing of combed wool and silver.

Her hair, still wet from the carbolized water, curled up in an aura of gold, alive with the red of life. Soft tendrils fell down childishly over her brow. Suppressed excitement and her late plunge in cold water had brought a glow to her pale cheeks. She had come into touch with things strange and unfathomable as she sat by the sick boy's bed, and the stir of them lingered still in her eyes,

but sometimes this was sent flying by a flash of protest, mocking, challenging, terrible!

Mr. Norman was aware of very extraordinary things going on that evening in his chief's wife, and so lonely was she, so conscious of the measureless depths of passionate life within herself, of the mysteries of pain and despair awaiting all the lives that touched hers, that she made no effort to hide herself from the only man who could see. He glanced with some apprehension at Antrobus, and thanked his stars that Mary was just what she was. Once a weird desire took hold of him to take over the job—whatever it was—for Antrobus, who had his hands just then more than full with an experiment which might mean much in the councils of men. The notion tickled him; he glanced at Mrs. Antrobus, and laughed as he passed her some fruit, and all at once her odd, dominating significance took supreme hold of him—the magical charm of her face, its light insouciance, its bewildering invitations and repulsions, the humour and the pathos of it, its mystic suggestions of wickedness and profundities of pain—of pain such as no man may dare to dream.

Even as he laughed he felt stirred and repelled, and gathered himself in a little away from her. His very chair, in the insensible movement of his mind, drew closer to Mary! What a house of defence she was! Mary! So sure and warm, so everlastingly fixed upon a rock!

"What a prig I am," he thought; the next minute he laughed again, and in the second of time a change had taken place in the *morale* of his merriment, and Mary was now at the root of it; centred in her he could have pity for all women, and a growing understanding of some. This understanding would, however, be always more illuminating in Mrs. Antrobus's affairs than in Mary's. Mr. Norman was not for the moment quite sure whether he were glad or sorry.

"I oughtn't to be laughing," he said, "ought I? It's a solemn occasion for all of us. That unfortunate fellow

can do nothing like a rational human being, not even get a diphtheritic attack."

"Dignity isn't his strong point, certainly," said Audrey. "He'd even die, I think, in a clumsy, unimportant sort of a way. But he can be silent like a man. I've just found that out."

"But surely he had something to say to you?"

"Oh, a great deal. Then he didn't shine, but he did in the silence. He mustn't die! He's got to live in order to justify that one moment of his existence, and confound the lot of you!"

"He's the meanest cribber I ever struck."

"Or I! That part was our fault—yours and mine and Andrew's, and the other man's," she said with serenity, and a comprehensive glance round the table. "You were too scholastic, and I too frivolous, to notice the beginnings of his illness. He's never been ill before, but he's often pretended to be, so he was afraid to own up, and felt outraged and cowed and capable of any meanness; besides, he wanted to please *me*."

"Oh!"

"He'd made promises, you see, in the moonlight, and you'll admit they're bewildering, even to the advanced moral consciousness, and I've been busy. I had no time for Macmahon's education."

"You have for ours, and your methods are charming. I wish I had known the beggar was ill, but that bout of malingering put us all off."

"It would, naturally, and his pathos is too ugly, no man living would be touched by it. I want him most frightfully to pull through everything—death and all!"

There was an eagerness in her face, so fierce and hard and insolent, that he could hardly have believed her tender, changing, pleasure-loving face capable of it.

"This illness will teach him to fight, I think," she said. "It's what he wants, don't you think?"

"I do. So far, he's only feebly beaten his ineffectual head against the enemy."

"But think of his difficulties, in that family of cast-iron intellects, and his life of hopeless contention against a succession of distracted and demoralized tutors, all his physical and mental betters."

"It's a sad case from every point of view."

"Talk of the mercy of the strong! Wait till he begins really to enjoy a fight. Directly he proves his strength in a big, decided battle, he'll give up guerilla warfare, and you just look out! It's the one thing that nothing can take away," she said, "the love of a fight. It's the first thing given you, and the last thing taken back. So long as you can fight, there's something left to you, don't you think?" Her lips were parted, her challenging eyes were upon him.

"But," he said, after a second's pause, "but what on earth can you know about it?"

"Everything!" she said promptly, with a quick laugh. "You must know very little of me or you wouldn't have said that—to-night. You'd have said something cheerful and encouraging. You'd have tuned up every drop of fighting blood in me, as, perhaps, some day I'll be tuning up Macmahon's.—Isn't it nice to see them eat? What's the matter with Dacre; can't he even be greedy? Is he anything?"

"He's a fellow for whom any crammer living may thank God."

"People will be thanking God for him in a mild way all the days of his life. His sins will never screw a tear or a smile from any woman, and he'll always produce the right platitude at the right moment, and get high in his exams., and all the great events in life will pass him by. I wonder if God'll get as tired of him as his wife will?"

"What about Forbes?" suggested Norman laughing.

"Forbes will make many a woman cry, but he'l know how to dry her tears, and he'll never be horrid to a child. He'll get into Sandhurst all right—he can do things—but I think he'll end in the 'Legion that never was listed.' I wish he wouldn't. I wonder what his mother is like."

"Mrs. Antrobus, why do you say this to-night?"

"I don't know—because I seem to know suddenly, and I'm rather sorry for sinners to-night."

"You could never upon any occasion fail a sinner. A saint might fare worse at your hands."

"I'd try to do justice even to him."

"Painful effort could never be wholly becoming to you. We'll hope that you may never need it."

"Do you generally speak to your superior officers—your C.O.'s wife, in this unpardonable way?"

"She's never tempted me before, so I've never fallen."

"I've stayed too long! but so long as the peaches held out I couldn't disturb them. One has so little time," she sighed, "in which to be greedy, or mad, and bad, and sad, and sweet—or anything else easy and elemental that makes the poems one can never forget. Moral obligations are the curse of civilization, don't you think?"

"Whatever I may think on these matters I keep to myself."

There was an appeal half elfish, half deprecating in the laughing face she turned to him over her soft, seductive shoulder.

"Couldn't she confine herself to being a rather unusual crammer's wife," he thought later on, "not sprite, wanton, and saint all in one. Poor Antrobus! I wonder if anything but time and tribulation could sort her out, and get the proportions in her more discreetly mixed. It's too complicated a job for any plain man. I wonder what's up. Mary would be considerably out of her element in this *galère*, but I could wish her nearer."

CHAPTER XXIII

HER very environment went to the further confounding of Audrey. The repulsions and attractions which form the bond and the barrier between completeness and incompleteness, between man and boy, penetrating the life on both sides, crying for mutual expression, mutual recognition, the suppressions and the audacities, were filling the wild brain of Audrey with a white heat of excitement. It beat, as with muffled strokes, upon her quivering heart. It tore the veil from some hidden niche of horrid laughter. Her lawless being had reached its limit of inarticulate pain. It clamoured for the licence of words, of strange indecent unrestraints. The retribution of the woman who has sinned swung Audrey that night towards madness.

For the woman, unlike the man—well-armoured in complacent reserves, with the whole of public opinion in his favour—has been, since the world was, naked body-slave to many bonds, unprotected by any opinion, sensitive to every stroke. She must receive in her unlearned heart every shaft the well-taught brain of man has learnt from the beginning to ward off from his.

No depth of corruption can protect a woman from her pure self, and so she falls sooner than man into the torture pits which twist secrets from living souls. Audrey was bewildered and full of fear. The primitive desire of the wounded to hurt and slay had her in grip. In the clang and chaos of horrid counsels she lost her way; her brain

rocked. The half of her could have shrieked out her story to all those men and boys, and laughed in the listening faces; the other half longed for the darkness to cover her.

And, after all, speech is the last poor resort of those who have forfeited their right to the white heights of silence. It was such a lost cause hers! Speech or silence were equally futile. What is the use of hiding that for which there is no hiding-place? The very air knew. The refuges of women are riddled with ambushes. Their sin, confessed, or unconfessed, lurks behind a thousand gaping doors, in the brains of men, in the entire economy of women, in the wide eyes of children and the hidden vision of those who die, for she is the last 'spoken word of God,' poor woman! His standard-bearer, open to all disaster. She cannot hug to herself the crowning joy of life any more than she can gather in and cover its crowning shame. As she must rejoice for the whole of mankind when a child is born, so for the whole of mankind must she suffer when one is dishonoured, her eternal birthright sold. She is in nothing entirely her own, for she, above all other creatures, has been bought with a price.

This is the vision of pain which spares no one who is a woman, not even light Audrey, with a soul not yet alive!

There is nothing deep enough, or strong enough, or secret enough, in earth, or sea, or sky, to cover the shame of a woman, and by the passion of His own agony to transmute it, and give it back to the world as the love which once it was, but the heart of Christ. It is the miracle of the world, which proves God.

But of these things Audrey knew nothing any more than the boys did who buzzed about her and courted her smile and drank her coffee.

It is true that this mad night she set ajar a little door for a fleeting instant to their searching eyes, but she kept her own counsel.

There was, however, a wistful kindness apparent in her even to him, which disturbed Mr. Norman. It was eminently unlike Mary, and spoke of plumbless depths in which he devoutly hoped that Mary would never flounder. There was a whisper as of a good-bye to some mystic something in Mrs. Antrobus that went but scurvily with the coffee and the big jugs of cream—she pampered the great hulking fellows! Norman would like to have lent a hand that night, but no matter what the strait might be, it was plain to both the friends that she must find her own lonely way out of it. Being honestly in love with Mary, he was honestly sorry for Mrs. Antrobus, but he left her that night to the boys and himself undertook the other men. Antrobus was hopeless at this period, awake only to three overpowering facts: his conscientious duty to his pupils, an experiment the fate of which hung in the balance, and Audrey.

As though the other pain were not enough, by nine o'clock Audrey ached all over with the mortal pin-pricks of the boys.

When they had gone she waited until Andrew, upon the impulse of a sudden inspiration, had also bolted; then she stood up and shook herself, her limbs and body, but she held tight her rocking head, and shut her eyes.

"And now," she said, "now I must say it." She spoke as a child might of a lesson; her lips were apart, her eyes wide, the singular translucence of her complexion was very striking. There was an appeal of infinite youth about her and of mighty contrasts and wide spaces. She looked like a child who had strayed from heaven, and looked into hell, and dazed by the mixed marvels of her journey, was wandering bewildered—anywhere.

"I must say it all," said she, "while I can speak like a human being. I want to shriek, and howl, and yell it into Andrew's ears. It seems the only way. And yet, where's the use?" she said; "where's the use? We're alive—at least, I am, and Andrew is by fits and starts,

and there will be an endless lot of to-morrows to be getting more alive in; and deafening Andrew right at the start won't alter anything. Besides, he might think I was mad, and put it all down to that, and then I'd have to begin all over again. I'd better go while I can speak—like a lady!"

A wild laugh broke from her as she gathered up her skirts, and ran lightly down the corridor.

She *was* an interruption, even his measureless love and illimitable wonder could not deny that, but in the same breath Andrew keenly reproached himself.

The visits of angels are so rare that the mortal who girds at them must indeed be churlish.

What he lost by her somewhat inconvenient presence would be made up a thousandfold by the ineffable benediction she would leave behind her. He put a chair for her, a low-cushioned one, he was learning something—this clumsy Andrew! and waited. She was plainly in a more silent mood than was usual with her. It would have been sacrilege to speak first. It might break some hidden spell.

His simplicities took Audrey's courage away. Still in silence she watched his maddening smile widen. All she could say in the end was "Sorry!"

He smiled with tender amusement. She said it in a small voice like the boys. The grotesqueness of the word struck into her sharply like a knife-thrust. She sat up with the sting of the pain. It seemed so strange—so strange!

The air of the room, the light of the lamp, the twinkling bottles, the queer, wise things on the table—they all knew all about her, and there sat Andrew, smiling, waiting, believing. If it had been anyone but Andrew—never, surely, was man so impossible to such a *rôle!*

The monstrous incongruity in the matter drove her back and back again from her implacable purpose. No words could fit it, none explain. With her evanescent charm, her elusive touches, she babbled of Macmahon, of

the nurse, of unimportant details. She confused Andrew. Horrid thoughts of diphtheria racked his brain. Audrey was never unreasonable, never a causeless distraction. Beyond all women, she knew what she wanted, and the value of time. She had always respected his privacy. Nothing but illness could account for her present proceedings.

For one instant he felt very much as an ordinary husband might have done, the next he beheld in himself a criminal.

"My dearest," said he; "I fear you're ill!"

She twisted in her chair and stood up before him like a more bewildered child than ever. Her hair, as the water dried, had grown more curly. It fell in wild pliant waves about her head and face. A ray of moonlight played on the white dress, the irrepressible life in her entreated and besought, not Andrew, but something beyond and above and about them, and it was to this she spoke, and not to Andrew, when the words came—swift, low, level words which would not be denied, or stayed, or silenced.

There was nothing violent or exaggerated, nothing even dramatic in the confession of Audrey. It was terse, unsparing, pointed with inevitable truth. Something behind her of which even in his agony Andrew had caught a glimpse still entreated, still besought something—but the child who faced him gave no quarter, even as she asked none.

The truth, throbbing and bleeding with naked life, lay hot before Andrew. His whole being rose in revolt. Involuntarily his hands, relaxed and powerless in the first shock, rose up to beat off from himself and from the child the horrible reality.

He knew! he knew! he knew! but the first impulse of the man must always be to defend the woman from his own knowledge. Then all at once his hands fell back impotent. A man may wrestle with an unknown God, but with the truth wherewith He has pierced his heart there

is no contending. He sat quiet, loose, limp, unbound as from a nightmare. His eyes were striving for sight, his ears for hearing. He looked round at last amongst the homely things wherein his quiet life had lain for some vague, new understanding. He had realized too small a corner of life! The world in which he had always lived had told him so little; of the red tares of the hot flesh he knew nothing at all. He had learnt neither mercy nor a mighty faith at the honest root of things. He was most pathetically unprepared to do justice to any sinful woman. He would inevitably over-estimate her strength and underestimate her temptation. He had never followed hard upon the hot scent of life, staking life itself upon the passionate chase, never ventured to drink of the magical waters of desire, to gaze fearless through the magic mirror, and so touch the illimitable beyond where the travelled eyes are focused, where the bold heart is fixed. The story of the cloth of common things had written nothing upon the consciousness of Andrew, nor had the potential uncleanness of a woman. And uncleanness in such a soul as hers, that which had been the soul of his soul!

This was the condemnation of Audrey. In this one moment of time his infinite possession of her passed into the had-beens.

"Oh, Audrey!" he said again. "Audrey!"

He loved her not less, but more; but this was gone with the other things which lay in ashes at her feet, her little twinkling feet!—Even now the gleam of a buckle on one of her small shoes made him shiver.

It was gone with the rest, this wonderful sense of sole possession, with his ideal, his consciousness of life, of God; his vague, immeasurable joy in all things and creatures; the warmth of living which Audrey had brought out into the light.

Her little foibles, her pretty follies, her wayward moods so sweet and dear, which ran in and out like a silver current through the deeper river of her grave beauty. Everything he had known and worshipped in her passed

before him in a mournful procession, and each, as it went by, added a deeper note to his deathless sorrow.

He had always been too bound in by limitations to accept the whole of any complex life even in its innocence; the very variety of the heights of Audrey had confounded him, and her depths—her guilt! It seemed to sweep him off his feet! An incredulous, amazed cry of protest broke from his lips.

"It can't be," said Andrew; "it can't be!"

"It is," she said, still standing before him, waiting.

There was a vague unseemliness in her attitude. Why did she stand whilst he sat motionless in her presence? And for what did she wait?

There was no more to say, no more to do, and that she should stand while he sat was incomprehensible! Dazed, baffled, half blind, almost foolish from this bludgeon-stroke of fate, as foreign to his nature as it was to his experience, Andrew stumbled to his feet, and watched the space between him and that which had been, growing, growing, growing! He judged her from the best he had in him, from the pellucid depths of his own purity, and that he had not penetrated into the eternal depths beyond was not the fault of Andrew, whose education had but just begun. He had hardly dared to face the flaming glory of the dawn of life, when, lo! it was snatched from him, and in its stead there arose about him the twilight of a life that is spent.

As they stood, the little space between, a curious sense of age fell upon Andrew, a slowing of his pulses, a mortal loss of hope, a detachment, a solitariness as of one who has failed young.

But still she waited—silent, and very white.

He watched her wondering, this Audrey who *was*, and a new sense came to birth in him with a laboured pang. A sense of responsibility, dim, bewildering, extraordinarily young and untaught, but something with which from henceforth he must reckon.

His quiet, scholarly, delicately-organized brain had

suffered change, and could not quickly readjust itself to the new conditions. His heart was dead, his eyes seared. He groped in the unaccustomed gloom of the evening life. He looked at her across the chasm which had swallowed the promise of the morning, the fulfilment of noon, and as he looked, from sheer force of old habit, the old inquiry, so intimately a part of him, grew up in his defeated eyes.

This hurt her, perhaps, more than all the rest. By this she realized the way in which he suffered. It was so like Andrew to ask her—her!

"What will you do with me?" she said, speaking for him as she had so often spoken before.

"There's nothing left surely but to take care of you!" he said at last.

"Yes," she said wearily. She was very tired; she could not stand much longer. Suddenly he understood that.

"Sit down," he said; "please sit down."

He spoke in a quick, anxious, nervous way; his eyes blinked and tried to clear themselves; his seeking fingers twitched. He might have been an ineffectual mother left suddenly without a nurse.

She could have screamed with agonized laughter, but, instead of that, she meekly sat down. She could no longer give way to her emotions as other women did. She was now one apart, half invalid, half suspect, with Andrew on guard, and the world listening at the door. The unutterable desolation of the dethroned queen was upon her. She had lost her supremacy; she quailed before the cold terror of her new life. She who had always given must now, in all things, accept.

She cowered shivering into her chair.

"You had better lie down," said Andrew, lamely.

"But before I do anything, I must know—things," she said tiredly. "There's so much for both of us to be sure of. There's my child—there's—everything. Would it be better if I went away?" she said simply.

"You're mine, to take care of," he said, jerking out the difficult words slowly. "I accept the responsibility of everything, of your child——" He broke off, looking away from her.

'If—if only you weren't you!" she whispered in the choking silence.

Some strangled cry seemed to reach him from his dead heart, but he put it aside.

"We can't change that," he said gently. "We can change nothing, but you're mine always to take care of. I'll do it clumsily at first, I fear, but I'll do my best, Audrey, and one can learn.

"Why did you tell me this?" he asked suddenly, a light shooting into his dull eyes.

"I—I had to."

"For Carfax's sake?"

"Yes."

"To square him?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" he said. "Ah!" with the indrawn breath of one who has received a mortal thrust. "Well, naturally," he added presently, as though to himself.

"If—if you had been anyone else!"

"It would have made no difference, you loved him."

"No," she said out of her great sadness; "it would have made no difference. I want to say one more thing. I must go to Southampton on Thursday to say good-bye. I've promised! It's the last time, and we've said good-bye already, really."

"Go!" he said; "of course, go. I want no explanations." Some warmth of humanity had left his voice.

She sighed and trembled.

"And after that you must rest. You must take care of yourself, and permit me to take care of you, and now you must go to bed."

"But I can't!" she said, after a pause. "I'm going to sit up with Macmahon. He's very ill; he'll die, probably—and I promised."

"Sit up with Macmahon!" he repeated. There was no irony in his voice, but the vague surprise in it struck Audrey. "It will be always like this," she thought drearily. "I'd rather die and go to hell."

There was a quick step on the stairs, a peremptory knock, and Dr. Lambert came in.

"You're right in your diagnosis, Mrs. Antrobus," said he. "The boy is worse than I thought. My nurse is good, but you're better. We'll have to save him between us. It's not my fault, Antrobus, it's your wife's; she's made herself indispensable, and none of us want to lose the boy. You don't look in the least fit for night nursing," he said, with a sharp look at her. "You didn't when I saw you in the room, so I've sent for this," he said, pouring something into a glass. "Hope it's clean, Antrobus; no witch's poison at the bottom of it? You must take it three times in the night, and I've taken the liberty of ordering nourishment for you as well as the nurse. My nurse doesn't mind the arrangement in the circumstances, and that's noble of her, I can tell you. I'll be back at one o'clock. Very sorry, Antrobus, but blame your wife and not me."

He went as he had come, with unhurried staccato celerity, and they were together with their secret, and the silence.

Neither broke it, for in the homely, brisk announcement of the poor little tragedy of life, common to both, and in which their hearts must beat as one, their brains co-operate, their hands join, the dividing secret had grown like a gourd. For a moment Andrew felt as though the horror of it must stretch its foul tentacles into every atom of his being, absorb the whole of him, and drink his life away. It would lie down with him at night, and in the morning arise with him; he would be no longer himself, but the prey of this hideous encroachment, from which there could be neither rest nor respite.

To-morrow, as upon a thousand to-morrows, it would remain—this secret—a pain upon which no dawn should

arise, no sun go down. The room whispered the secret, the garden throbbed with it. It was too great for human heart to hold—and this to be between them!

Audrey, sensitive to any pain, could hardly endure her own; but Andrew's, heaped on top of it, must inevitably make an end of her. Laying violent hands on her whole being she stood up, and, what is more, she stood steadily. She put a big call upon life, and life, the irresistible, replied to the call!

"I know," she said. "Don't think I don't know, Andrew; I know just what it is to you, Andrew, and, in addition, I've got Larry!"

He started. Her voice sounded like strange, broken bells in the lonely evening. "I'm not asking for pity," she said with sudden pride; "I only say it in case you should think I don't understand—everything. But I can't think any more now; I can't be sorry any more! —or anything. I've got to do my best for Macmahon.

"I wish," she said, turning to him, a mother's look in her extraordinary eyes, "I wish you'd do some big thing to-night. You could," she said, speaking slowly. "You could do anything——" She paused and sighed.

"There's no going back," she said. "It's done, and one must go on—on—on! If one didn't, one would die, don't you think?"

She went out quickly, firmly, unfalteringly. He heard her go up the stairs, open the door, gently shut it. He heard her soft step as she went on—on—on!

Andrew, in common with other men, had his own idea of the repentant Magdalen, and a most humble and reverent appreciation for her, but this! He was bewildered, amazed, broken with anguish, to which, in earth and in heaven, there was no clue.

If she had cried! He could have understood tears! But of her wild heart or her wild virtue he had no understanding.

CHAPTER XXIV

AUDREY with the prescience which dire necessity and direr pain had brought to birth in her, knew quite well what Andrew, even in the manner of her repentance, demanded from her, expected from her, and even in this she must bruise and wound him.

She smiled drearily as she went up the stairs.

"Even in this poor little thing I can't oblige him," she said drearily. "I'd do anything—I'd cut off my hair—I would! What does it matter now! I'd cut it off and stand in a sheet at the church door at the eleven-o'clock service, if it would give him one atom of satisfaction; but what good would it do? And tears—they make your eyes red and take up your time! One must go on; one can't wait. I haven't cried once for Larry, not properly," she said, the tears raining down her cheeks. "If Andrew knew that, I—I wonder if he'd feel better? And what's the good of looking back? If I sat down now to look at my sins and think of Larry, what would become of Macmahon, I'd like to know? It's not the moment either for tears or for remembrances. A pillar of salt or a fountain of tears would be equally out of place. I can't oblige Andrew—oh! poor Andrew!" she sobbed, as she tore off her clothes. "I must forget all the things that interrupt, and just go on, and try to catch hold of the life in Macmahon. It's crying out to me! I can hear it," she said, plunging into the cold bath set ready for the morning. "I can actually hear it!" she repeated, gasping with the douche, "and his poor, ugly, importunate body must not die when it wants so much to live!"

"And his soul—oh! bother it!" she said. His salvation or her own were as much beside the mark in the wild pressure of events as either remorse, or shame, or any other deep and mortal pain.

It was the life in the boy crying to hers that set upon every action of Audrey the sign manual of victory.

Once, whilst dressing, she yielded to a fatal temptation, and paused with her ivory brush half lifted.

"I'd like to go to bed for ever," she said, and in instantaneous obedience to her faltering thought she got quite white and cold. But she had sense enough to stand up and beat her hands together, and stamp with her stiffening feet, and get hold of herself again.

"Anyway, I can't," she said. "I've just got to go on. If I stopped once—but since I can't, what's the use of being idiotic?"

When ten minutes later, perfectly dressed in a cool green linen, neat and finished, with burnished hair, she stood beside Macmahon's bed, she looked as fresh as a flower. Dr. Lambert glanced at her with mounting interest.

"I thought I'd better look in again," he said. "Shall I tell you what to watch for?" he asked, with a dubious glance at her toilet and her brilliant face, and some grim amusement at the quiet confidence with which she looked down at the boy whose condition was now almost desperate.

"No," she said airily. "Nurse, who knows, can attend to these things. I'll be watching for the life behind them. He wants to live and he's got to. My intelligence can go no further. So don't muddle it with knowledge."

"I quite agree with you. The less you know of symptoms the better," he said drily, taking the thermometer from under Macmahon's arm and handing it to the nurse. Her expression was respectful and confirmatory.

"I daresay he *feels* you both looking like that," said Audrey tranquilly. "Never mind them, lad. They're wise and we're foolish, but we know what we want. And

no decent soldier, or even the makings of one, would think of letting himself be beaten by a beastly little microbe. It is a microbe, isn't it?" she said, turning her innocent gaze upon the doctor; "one likes to be reasonably accurate."

"It's possibly a form of fungus."

"That's even lower in the social scale, Macmahon, and a soldier has worse things to fight than microbes and funguses."

"Oh!" said the prim little nurse under her breath.

"You're not a Christian Scientist, are you, by any chance?" said the doctor, as he washed his hands, "or a Faith-healer?"

"Now!" she said, warmly flushing. "Have I the Christian Science smile or the Faith-healer's figure? I didn't expect this of you, Dr. Lambert."

"When are his people coming?"

"They're in Paris. They'll arrive just in time to be a nuisance, just when his attention oughtn't to be distracted for one instant from getting well. I feel sure that aunt will want to be pawing him when the occasion for it is at an end. I'm not uncharitable, but I've seen the box she sent his things in, and you haven't."

"You're incorrigible," he said, chuckling in spite of his grave fears.

She followed him to the door.

"He's going to live?" she said.

"My small particle of knowledge says no, so for his people's sake and yours I've asked Antrobus for a second opinion. He'll be here at ten to-morrow."

"Then tell him for goodness' sake not to be thinking horrid, depressing thoughts in this room and airing his knowledge. It's such a simple business," she said, with tired, wise, laughing eyes; "why must you be complicating it? There's too much knowledge about already with you and your nurse. It's wicked ignorance that's going to save Macmahon. It's the only thing he understands. With two mathematical geniuses on the

premises it took *me* to explain the nature of a rider to him."

She glanced with a strange little smile at the ugly form, heaving and gurgling on the bed. "Perhaps we're affinities, Macmahon and I; that might account for it!"

With a deprecatory thought of his wife, a handsome, angular lady who took life seriously, he smiled. At the same time, he was a little sorry for Antrobus. So triumphantly cock-sure a young lady must be a disturbing element on a scientific hearthstone. As a philosopher, Dr. Lambert distrusted this novel element in a sick-room; as a man, he believed in it considerably more than he did in the specialist—that is, when he looked at Audrey. Directly he got out of sight of her he pinned all his faith on the man from town.

Meanwhile Audrey set to bending all her mind to avoid treading on people's toes, and to upset, to the best of her ability, all their scientific calculations. She refused to see anywhere anything but indestructible life. Sometimes she kept the life going in herself by startling the nurse out of her primness by a merry laugh, or a story told in her full, sweet voice. She never spoke under her breath, and never did she leave the boy out of the conversation, or let her eyes stray long from him. She spoke to him, and appealed to him with the sincerest, most simple belief that he both heard and understood. Why she believed it she neither knew nor cared. The one certain thing was that unless he was asleep, Macmahon stirred to the sound of her voice, so she could defy all the expert knowledge in the kingdom, and keep her hope alive. She knew he would want her most in the darkness, so from the beginning she had decided to rest by day and be with him by night. She put him to sleep at last by pouring out beside him endless floods of old rhymes picked up heaven alone knows where!

They were strangely sad, and sweet, and wild, and Nurse Donne, who had a literary and critical turn, and had patiently waded through countless anthologies, was puzzled to account for any of them. Then, with an odd

glance at his nurse, suddenly breaking away from the rhymes, Mrs. Antrobus repeated several psalms quite accurately and in the purest, most beautiful voice. By this time Macmahon was asleep, and her own concerns were down again upon her, so she curled up limply in a big chair, and her face dropped tiredly on the arm nearest the lamp. She seemed, to the fascinated gaze of the nurse, to gather up all the little tags of poetry, one after the other, and to repeat each in flesh and blood, its sweetness, its sadness, above all, its magic wildness and strange revolt! The nurse's eyes looked startled behind their glasses. She drew her lips in at the corners. She prepared strongly to disapprove of everything. She had had a sound evangelical upbringing, and had supported for five years an impossible husband. Both dispensations tell on a woman, and make her eyes sharp to behold iniquity.

The proceedings and general bearing of Mrs. Antrobus filled nurse with many gloomy apprehensions.

Then a little careless, petulant movement of the incomprehensible young woman made her much more plain to the expert, and touched the truest, sweetest, freshest spot in her sore-tried, worn heart, the little grave which held her one dead child. It had been but scurvily received by its father, this poor morsel! He pathetically resented the inroads its advent had made upon the valuable time of his wife, and his prophetic eye quailed before what was yet to come. He need not have disturbed himself. It lived only five hours, but it spent well its little life. It turned the patient eyes of its mother in a new direction. And even if a woman only looks steadfastly into the unseen in search of a baby five hours old, her vision inevitably enlarges; she asks for more, and she who asks, expecting, will as surely receive. Her baby gathered into his little hands all the commonness of the dust-strewn life of little Nurse Donne. But to enable her to give out that with which he continually filled the void, called for the dynamic power of some other baby thought, or touch, or pain.

Moreover, to anyone who has suffered and rejoiced in the bearing of life, the first herald of its coming must always be a shock of joy, of grief, of all the heights, and all the depths in the unity that makes us one. The mystic joy and the mystic pain even in the first breath of spring can never stir and move a man as it must always stir and move a woman. It will make him strut, indeed, and puff himself out, and will beckon him seductively to his own ends, but very rarely will it bring him weeping to his knees.

The invitation is too elusive, its intimacy too lacking of the warm earth.

But upon the present occasion Nurse Donne had no desire whatever to be moved or stirred; she would vastly have preferred to keep on disapproving with a right mind. Her eyes shied away from their own testimony; she wiped the moisture from her spectacles and looked again more boldly. And with the second look she forgot everything but the one thing.

The insolence of rank, its intrusive presumption, the vanity of petted women, the seductiveness of unscrupulous ones, even the dim suggestion of something "not right" in the alien interloper—all the bristling barriers that divided them fell like Jericho's walls, and Nurse Donne took possession of Mrs. Antrobus.

They were two women together, and she the wiser of the two. As one with authority, she put a pillow under the small white face, and drew the chair in which Audrey lay nearer to the fire, pleasant in the cold before the dawn; then with mounting superiority, she sat awaiting developments. The patient needed nothing. Her time was her own. It made her feel almost ecstatic to be able to look upon this blatant worldling from any height of experience.

"A nice set-out," she mused. "I should have been informed. That's what comes of marrying a dreamer; and I daresay the doctor is also in total ignorance. Doctors are like other men, they observe nothing about a woman

except that she's pretty—if she's pretty enough, that is, and used to getting her own way. And if she'd been used either to obedience, or to self-discipline, Mrs. Antrobus wouldn't be here to-night."

Quite unconsciously she sniffed. A very considerable amount both of obedience and of self-discipline had done precious little for her. She stooped to put back one of Audrey's feet which had slipped off the stool.

Audrey, deciding after a short trial that her own complications must wait until Macmahon's were decided one way or the other, was watching her out of the tail of her eye.

The nurse's fixed gaze was slowly becoming significant. She sighed; her face was full of the demand of a superior being. With the speed of an arrow Audrey shot to her feet, scattering the pillows.

"Will you allow me to tell you, Mrs. Antrobus," said Mrs. Donne sternly, "that you must not move in that impetuous manner. It is—er—criminal. The patient is asleep. Will you lie down like——"

"A human being," suggested Audrey.

The impulse to fling out something daring took the nurse, but she drew in her lips in time.

"The whole thing is madness. How it's permitted is beyond me! But, Mrs. Antrobus, will you take the few precautions possible in the astounding circumstances?"

Audrey's cheeks were scarlet, but she was laughing a little. This transformation in the quiet, prim woman was so weird, and yet there was a dignity in it. Powers she had never suspected in so meek a creature, were plainly being unearthed in Nurse Donne, and to be in any going concern was always fascinating to Audrey. She had seen Andrew's eyes glow as he stirred life out of a dead pond. She experienced much the same sensation when she beheld this mould, in which professional propriety had set and hardened, manifesting lively emotions.

"I've never seen an outburst of professional zeal before," she murmured. "It's delightful. Please go on."

The woman flushed a light puce.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Antrobus," she said quietly, kneeling to make up the fire.

"But goodness gracious!" cried Audrey. "You've just shown that you know better than that, than to think I could be horrid in that sort of way. My minor sins are never unforgivable, I wish you to know. I only want you to speak as you spoke just now, to let me find out new things in you, see things you generally take care to hide. Until this minute I thought you just a model nurse, and a most superior woman, and they're so unstimulating when—when you're lonely and people are ill. And now, just when you've begun to be so nice and interesting, there you are, rolling yourself up like a hedgehog and thinking me a beast."

"I shouldn't presume to think you anything of the sort, Mrs. Antrobus."

"Not in those words; but yours are much more telling, really. And with *that*," she said, glancing round half shivering at Macmahon, "and all sorts of mysteries so near—such a word as presumption can't exist. We're you and me together, groping in the dark in this queer, quivering sort of loneliness. You'd feel different from me in the day, of course, and be sorry if you didn't, but here in the night, with the boy there fighting for the life he's made such a mess of, we're just two women. Did you know that he was a hopeless sort of poor thing, nurse, the despair of all sensible people? But he does want to get well so much, and I'm so desperately anxious that he should. No matter how undeserving people are, I want them to get what they want. You think that an awful doctrine, don't you?" inquired Audrey, with an odd look at her. "You've drilled yourself into complete self-repression, I think. I wonder why? I should have thought you were humble enough by nature, without using artificial means. I should like to know. It's suddenly become extremely interesting."

On the rare occasions when one woman is absolutely

sincere with another the other knows it. Nurse Donne clasped her small knotted white fingers.

"I had a baby once," she said, "and it taught me many lessons; above all, I think, the responsibilities of life and its solemnity, and the manifold dangers of self-indulgence."

"Nothing will persuade me that you ever wanted such lessons. It takes one's courage away to listen to you."

"I needed every lesson that I have received, Mrs. Antrobus, and, thank God! nature can be overcome."

"You've overcome yours, certainly. I wish you'd tell me what the result feels like?"

"Like duty at least attempted," said she, with a meekness to make one shudder.

"It's like a Buddhist stripping himself of every joy, through a thousand lives, just for the sake of one little miserable starved soul. Why should we be given a nature only to thrust it out in the cold like a stray dog? It's not reasonable."

"It's the discipline of life. We cannot pit our feeble strength against it."

"We can pit our extremely strong nature against unnatural and unreasonable exactions," said Audrey with decision. "I believe what our poor little nature wants is adding to, not taking away from; to have nice warm, becoming clothes put on it, not to be stripped naked and exposed to every east wind. Now, dear Nurse Donne, don't say anything humble-Christian. One of my sisters-in-law, whom I dearly love, is a humble Christian, and I know all their arguments, and I have the smallest possible opinion of them. Tell me about your baby and why it died. I feel it died. I don't think you look like a happy mother. Perhaps if you did," she added, "you wouldn't have felt so kind just then to me. Being too happy makes you forget other people, don't you think?"

Nurse Donne was barely in a position to think at all. She was repeating texts to herself, and wondering what it must feel like to be pretty enough to get your own way all along the line always, without visible effort, and to say

unseemly things with propriety. For the first time in her existence her child had taken a back seat; she knew it, and flushed a more unbecoming puce than usual. This also she knew, and it made her forget her texts.

She had so much, this other woman, without one thought of religion, and probably not even the beginnings of a layette. She was the sort of thing Mrs. Donne had been brought up to hope for the best for; and now to be longing to be like her! There was something about Mrs. Antrobus it was impossible to put into words. Nurse Donne felt absolutely certain that the devil was not very far off. And yet she dared not hoodwink either herself—or God. What would she not have given to have the indescribable attraction of this strange sinner! "To have been a Christian for fifteen years and be so little worthy of the name!"

She put her child tenderly back in his place and spoke harshly in her contrition.

"My child lived just five hours, and then God took him."

"Oh! oh!" said Audrey, in a quick, scared way. "I—I do hope you cared for his father most awfully."

"Thank God!" said Mrs. Donne, "I did my duty by my husband."

"You poor thing!" thought Audrey.

'I wish the baby hadn't died."

"It was God's will."

"Don't say that again, please, not here in the dim light and death all around us." Audrey shivered and looked over her shoulder into the shadows, then hurriedly back into the fire. "Oh, please, nurse, just touch him and see if he's all right.

"Perhaps it wasn't God's will. It doesn't seem probable—to-night, with all the curious things going on all around us. I feel them. They seem to be listening to us. I wish to goodness they wouldn't. They know too much. I feel this minute as if a searchlight was being waved up and down in my inside."

The nurse started. The symptoms seemed to point to mental disturbance:

"How long have you been a nurse?" asked Audrey.

"Just fifteen years, Mrs. Antrobus."

"Why, you must be saturated with this sort of thing. Don't you feel sometimes as if you could hold no more, as if you must blow up in order to breathe?"

The nurse stared.

"I can't say, Mrs. Antrobus, that I do."

"But don't you feel—the things going on—feel that they know more of you than is altogether agreeable?"

Mrs. Donne rearranged the restless foot of the worldling.

"My life has been a life of discipline, Mrs. Antrobus. I have learnt to curb my imagination."

"Oh! But surely sometimes you must have given it its head, taken off the bit and bridle just for a treat, and given your poor imagination food and drink and a little exercise. There must have been disorganized moments in your life when the door of duty got off the latch, and your imagination and the other forbidden things came out to breathe. I'm quite absolutely certain it broke loose when your baby died."

Audrey's eyes were full of a bold challenge; she laughed softly. "One must have a great many joys to give up any one of them willingly to any God," she said, "and when it's only one little ewe lamb! Even if you were encased in duty, you couldn't say, 'God's will be done' at first. Don't say you could, dear Nurse Donne, for I wouldn't believe you, and I don't think even God would."

"It did take time," she admitted with sad, clasped hands. Nurse Donne had a hunted look. The amazing conversation was telling upon her, and yet she panted to hear. The imagination she had so sternly controlled was struggling in its bonds. She was perfectly well aware that this recreant member had always clung hard to the devil, that her conquest over it was but partial. She cast a furtive look into the dim shadows; never in all

her experience had she passed so unseemly a night; but she made a big effort, straightened her little valiant back, and delivered her testimony.

"It did take time, Mrs. Antrobus. I was rebellious and stiff-necked. I would not yield my will to His, but in the end I found comfort—found comfort in God."

Audrey leaned over and looked gravely in her face.

"Adeline all over again," she murmured. "It's perfectly true, you did. How extraordinary it must be! I seem to be porous to all sorts of distracting things; everything horrid trickles into me except this sort of thing that belongs to you and to my sister-in-law. And yet it fascinates me. One likes to experience, to know. One hates being out of anything," she said, staring into the fire. "It's just the same when I'm with Adeline. She's extremely wrong-headed. Her sacrifices are idiotic, but she's got something I haven't, just as you have, and I don't like it; it makes me feel small." Audrey glanced with interest at the lean, unilluminated face, at the stiff, flat chest and flatter waist. "And Adeline has cancer," she said, "and she's been sat on all her life. It seems to square a good deal for both of you."

She leaned back in her chair, kicked off her shoes and stretched out her feet to the blaze. There was a hint of heathenish abandonment in the action. The nurse was excited. A vision of the dances of naked savages arose in her mind. Yet here was an opportunity. She almost choked in her effort to rise to it.

"A baby is frequently a means of grace, Mrs. Antrobus."

"Oh! Doesn't it depend?" said Audrey, her eyes on the fire. "Suppose a baby had no right to appear, for instance, would it be a means of grace, then, do you think?"

The nurse looked at her sharply. There was a suspicion of mockery in the artless, watching eyes that half mystified, half offended her.

For a moment she said nothing; she stooped to put a

pillow under the little feet. She was bewitched by the strange night's doings, by her own mounting interest in one for whom her better judgment had not one good word, and now those godless, irreverent eyes!

She looked again, and could not comprehend how so much sadness could show forth from such a face.

"Do answer," said Audrey.

"That is a question I cannot presume to deal with, Mrs. Antrobus. Personally, I have no vocation for rescue work. I have subscribed according to my means to the cause, but that sort of iniquity does not appeal to me."

"Oh!" said Audrey. "Oh!"

"Your baby, I hope, Mrs. Antrobus, will teach you many things of which you are now ignorant, and in many ways. That is, if you receive it in the right spirit."

"What's that precisely?"

The inquiry was not made in the right spirit; of that there could be little doubt. Nurse Donne bridled.

"As a chastening messenger from God, Mrs. Antrobus. One for whom you must be prepared to sacrifice yourself in a thousand ways. A baby is, I assure you, no light responsibility."

"Dear me! Duty and sacrifice again! You never mention pleasure."

"I've known so little of it. For fifteen years I've been watching pain, and, thank God! its sanctifying effect."

Audrey wriggled in her discomfort. To-night she was down on the bare bed-rock of everything. The bleak, primitive, anxious morality of the woman suited her mood. She was so safe in the hands of this creature, so ignorant of everything. This dull, good little nurse, sodden with blind obedience to God and man. And in the piercingly wise atmosphere, the sad, reminiscent silence she was so lonely, so full of a throbbing life of which she knew so little, so near another life of which she knew less, and so she turned with relief and yearning to any homely comfort.

The minute conventions, the commonplace narrowness of the woman, her point of view, her scale of emotion and set of gown and cast of feature, were all so safe and so ridiculous in any big demand of sense, or soul, or circumstance. She had been born in a uniform, and spent her tender youth in looking forward humbly to a depressing matrimonial career, and now she purified her harmless little soul in looking back to it. The pivot on which she turned was much more the unspeakable husband than the five-hours' baby. That was a painful joy, and to dwell too much even on a painful joy savours of idolatry. By no stretch of the imagination could her feelings towards her husband be connected with idolatry. In the companionship of such a person one is, indeed, preserved from many sins!

"One good look inside her would be extremely interesting," thought Audrey, and suddenly she was afraid even of that.

The silence, broken only by the quick, hard breathing of the sick boy, seemed alive and to be drawing in about her. She drew closer to the nurse and in a childish little way she caught hold of her apron.

"Sacrifices seem to differ a great deal," she said. "Suppose a sacrifice got mixed up with a great deal of pleasure and a great deal of sin, would it lose all its savour in your eyes?"

Nurse Donne looked scared.

The conversation, she felt in her bones, was becoming *risqué*. She did not disdain modern literature and had "studied" French.

"But—but, Mrs. Antrobus! I don't understand you."

Audrey turned innocent, inquiring eyes upon the fire.

"It's so hard to think of an instance. Oh! well, I do know a case in point just now; it won't matter if I don't mention names. Suppose a married woman cared for some one else? It happens, you know, in—in worldly circles in London and Paris."

Again Nurse Donne bridled. This was a more intimate experience even than novels. It brought the devil in a way closer.

"They were both getting ready for a divorce, when suddenly it struck the—er—woman that this sort of thing would do a lot of harm to the man—spoil his career, in fact, say he was in the Diplomatic Service, or the Army, or Navy—so she simply insisted on his giving her up—he didn't want to a bit—and came home to mind the house, and mend the socks, and be good ever after. The husband was very good and knew nothing about anything; but she told him everything all right, so as to begin again all good and nicey. Now, you see, it would be pretty awful for the woman; bad enough for the others, of course, but worse for her. Do you think in that case that the sacrifice would square things a bit all round and make the contraband baby—if there was one—a means of grace?"

The nurse's eyes were nailed helplessly to her changing face.

"Oh, Mrs. Antrobus! I couldn't think of judging."

"But you're judging this minute."

"Pain sent by God——"

"Dear, good little nurse, I wish I could make you understand!" She sat up and fixed her eager eyes on the woman. "She loved the man most immensely, and the life with him rushed on—on—on! It was like a river at the flood, running straight out to a great sea, so full that it ached and overflowed—I know exactly how it all was—but she gave it all up, and came back to paddle about in a little back-water of life for the rest of her days, with nothing to look forward to and everything to regret. Can't you put aside the thought of sin just for a minute, and say what you really think?"

Nurse Donne had heard something of the goings-on of worldlings, not only in literature, but from less remote sources; but this shameless intimate demand! And yet the appeal to herself stirred her in a way it had no business to do; of that she was quite certain, but it went

on stirring her all the same. Never in all her experience had she conversed upon such topics on intimate terms at daybreak in a chamber of death. She was impotent, speechless. Education, we are told, consists in being prepared for any emergency. The education of Nurse Donne was plainly in its infancy. She quailed before the unexpected.

"Mrs. Antrobus," she wailed, "will you lie down even for half an hour?"

"Oh, dear me!" said Audrey; "that's not an answer, and I'm not delirious. I'm perfectly sane, and, what's more, I mean to know. It interests me to have your opinion on this matter; it will be the opinion of so many thousands of other good people. Very likely it would be the opinion of the husband; he was beautifully brought up by a good woman."

"It's a matter for prayer," pleaded the nurse. "Dear Mrs. Antrobus, ask God."

"Even if I did," she said slowly, "people don't get direct answers to prayer. We'll know all about God's opinion in time. I want to know yours now. It would be a right opinion; you'd share it with the best public opinion in every village in England, led on by every rector; and she's got to live in a village. So, you see how really important your opinion is to me. I've got to advise her, you see. Would the sacrifice square things? It's pretty big, and nothing's wasted in nature, they say; so why must this be the one exception? And would the baby be a means of grace?"

Her pellucid eyes steadily demanded a reply; but in spite of their clear innocence, a strange, unaccountable suggestion of sinister significance looked out from behind them.

Nurse Donne was anything but at ease. She spoke in jerks and with some slight acidity.

"If the lady you mention has any depth, if she is not wholly deadened by frivolity, if she is still capable of feeling pain, then this unfortunate child may, in the end,

prove the cause of her conversion. Sometimes God chooses strange methods."

"Yes! He chose an ass once; a baby is nicer, don't you think? So as long as the poor wretch can keep on feeling awful, there's some chance for her! It's a curious sort of hope to hang on to! Can she never be happy again—never in all her life?" Audrey shivered. "It makes you feel deadly," she said; "and after all, it's done. Nurse! do say something nice!"

"Oh! Mrs. Antrobus, and the poor woman! What can I say? Every repentant sinner will some day rejoice."

"Oh! in Heaven! but it's so remote and hymn-booky—and think of all the years of the meanwhile! Good people have less imagination than bad, I think, even to begin with, before they've curbed it. And yet perhaps I wrong them; after all, they invented hell, and that wanted an imagination, if ever anything did."

"Oh! don't, Mrs. Antrobus," panted Nurse Donne, "and in your condition!"

"Would it be better if I were to meditate on hell just now? would it be more likely to make my baby a means of grace? Do good women always think of hell before their babies are born? It's hard luck on the babies, I think," said Audrey tiredly, pushing back her gleaming hair.

"I wish some frightful sinner would invent a new religion, who'd felt inside him, you know, what hell really meant, and could describe it properly at first hand. That religion would teach people everything, and it would be full of mercy. It would never hurt anything again, and it would guard everybody in the whole world from the tiniest thought of hell."

"Dear Mrs. Antrobus, let us talk of something else!"

"I wish you'd understand," said Audrey petulantly. "You might in this curious light, and with curious things going on so near us, and with your five-hours'-old baby, and being a Christian martyr inside you. If some saint

could live just for one week in the heart of a sinner with an open mind, she'd convert the world. It must be a woman," she reflected; "it would take a man a month to find out what a woman would know in a week, and no saint could stand a month in the inside of a sinner; the whale's would be a fool to it. He'd become unbalanced with the strain, and come back as parochial as ever."

Nurse Donne looked flushed and apoplectic.

"Mrs. Antrobus," she almost spluttered, "will you let me nurse you? I am fully qualified."

"I should like you to nurse me. You'd be very kind and nice and un-understanding, and we'd have plenty of time for conversation."

She smiled like an angel in the little woman's face, and touched her hand in an odd, appealing way.

"I think I'd like to have you, but first you must promise something, or I'll not. Now listen," she said, sitting up straight; "will you promise faithfully never once to think of hell, but simply to nail your eyes to Heaven between now and then? If you don't, I won't have you. Will you promise?"

Nurse Donne tottered. She hung on wildly to thoughts of opportunities, but her carnal mind said: "Yes."

"But do you think you can for weeks on end?" said Audrey.

The nurse looked sheepish.

"I'll make an effort, Mrs. Antrobus. I'll make it a matter of prayer."

"I wonder if you know what you're letting yourself in for," said Audrey with a little laugh.

CHAPTER XXV

A SUDDEN change in the boy's face brought both women to their feet, and for the next two hours they found but little time for speculation.

The nurse did her duty finely without a ray of hope; Audrey did little else than hope on steadily with all her resolute heart.

The hideous unfairness of letting him die now upon the very threshold of a new chance appealed so strongly to every sporting instinct in her that she seemed as one literally inspired.

To Audrey the issue of the battle no longer concerned one poor little life; there were bigger issues involved. The struggle held everything. It was the weak against the strong for all time. To lose him now were ineffaceable dishonour, not only to her and to the nurse and doctor, but to the world itself. Her whole being seemed to expand in the fierce fight. She simply took the matter into her own hands and defied the Universe for this poor fool who wanted at last to do better!

Without a thought of God in her godless heart, she was fighting that night for the honour and the justice and the lovingkindness of God. She was possessed by the impersonal passion of a great soldier. The doctor wondered whether she were saint or devil. He was glad his wife was safe in her bed. The nurse lifted up a prayer for the unborn child, and at last the boy breathed freely; the crisis was past.

"And now you'll lie down, Mrs. Antrobus," said the nurse and the doctor in a breath.

"Indeed I will, for two hours, and then I have to go to Southampton to see a friend off to the war."

"Mrs. Antrobus!"

"It's all right," she said, laughing. "I can put as much sleep into two hours as other people can into a whole night, and we don't have wars every day and friends going off to them. I'll be with you to-night, Macmahon," she said, leaning down to him; "so be getting ready for me all the time. You mustn't give us so much trouble to-night, you know, because we'll all be tired."

Dr. Lambert was genuinely anxious about her; he distrusted too much pent energy in women. After such a night, to be gadding off to Southampton! He had fallen a good deal under the dominion of his wife, and when at nine-thirty he saw Mrs. Antrobus in serene perfection on the steps, he felt annoyed.

"She's not a saint," he reflected. "It's in the marrow of her bones to spend herself on fads and frivolities. All this nursing business is against nature."

Her husband was standing beside the motor, and at sight of him a distinctly startled look touched her face, and she flushed brilliantly.

"I have excellent advice to give you both," said the doctor drily, "but I think I'll keep it to myself."

"And please don't let the specialist be too depressing," said Audrey.

"Antrobus knows, if anything, less of her than I do," he mused as he walked off.

She had not seen Andrew since that moment when he stood helpless on the threshold of the new life, and now to find him here! It was odd and dreadful; it made her heart beat, but it was Andrew all over, to be accepted with everything else. As Audrey flushed he had grown a little whiter.

"And he'll be here when I come back, too," she thought, with a horrid feeling of suffocation, "to protect me! It would hurt less, I think, if he beat me."

"Take all the care you can of yourself." he said. "The boy is better. Must you sit up with him to-night?"

"Oh, I must! He's not safe yet, anything but safe, but I'll lie down when I come back."

He tucked her in with clumsy carefulness, and as he stood up, she noticed that he had dropped back into his old stoop. She had quite cured him of it, and had begun to feel rather proud of his figure. Her breath came in little noiseless pants. Unless this were nipped in the bud, what would be the end of them?

"Andrew," she said desperately, leaning down to him, "if you fall back into all your old habits, you'll never get through at all, and then neither shall I. The one single thing is to hold yourself as stiff as a ramrod, and now your back is bent like a bow. I'm grateful to you for coming to see me off. Oh, Andrew, I am! but—but you frighten me! It's I who ought to be bent double, don't you see, and not you; and yet nothing will induce me to stoop. It will take my courage away to be always watching you, and I want it all, Andrew. If only you could get your mind back on your work! Oh, poor Andrew! Good-bye! I only make things worse."

So Andrew went back into his class-room with another burthen of obligation upon his tired shoulders, and from that day he was never seen to stoop again, unless it might be in the course of an experiment; but Audrey soon forgot her pain in another, the greater as usual swallowing up the less.

This misery rocked her to sleep in the train, but the pain that was to keep her sleepless for many a night to come met her at the station. Larry's face, with the triumph of life on it, and the sorrow of parting. In a quick flash of insight she saw that in some sort he had already conquered everything that can hold a man back —sin, sorrow, regret, foreboding—everything but love!— and she was left at home with defeat. Her fight was all to come. Andrew was saddening, but Larry seemed to slay her. She trembled and laughed.

"But you love me just exactly the same," she said, "in spite of the war."

"How could I love you any different, goose? And what has the war to do with it?"

"It has a lot to do with it. You're quite new."

"Not I. I'm as old as sin, and thirsting for the blood of the righteous, It's my first chance, you know. Wars don't hang on every bush."

"Take me for your page, Larry, and I'll sharpen your tailor sword with a patent steel."

"Come along," he said.

He was piloting her through the crowd, and although he had learned to trust Audrey in most contingencies, he did not like the look in her eyes now. She had no war to square everything as he had; she had it all to bear! Poor Audrey!

"You've been killing yourself with that boy," he said. "I oughtn't to have let you come."

"As if you could have kept me away! I told Andrew everything last night, and just now he came to see me off."

Larry whistled.

"He looked bowed to the earth with my sin. I think he'd feel better if I stooped too, but I can't. I'll hold myself better than ever, Larry, when you come home to see."

"You needn't tell me, dear. I know you."

"So does Andrew."

"Possibly as Mrs. Antrobus.—Audrey, write every week, dear; tell me everything. Don't leave out one trifle. You're mine while I'm alive. Nothing can alter that."

"I wonder," said Audrey. "This war has altered you more in a month than I did in three years."

"The thought of you has come largely into the thought of bloodshed, darling."

"I'm being a chastening dispensation to two men, it seems. It's—it's too much for one woman. You look

a rather boastful and blatant warrior, Larry. You're rather like Tartarin going to kill lions.—Oh! look at the faces of those women!"

They were now in the shed opposite the transport, amidst piles of baggage, tardy question and quick reply, the faces of absorbed men and sorrowful women. A mother waited with mournful patience while her boy swaggered round in his first khaki. A more courageous one smiled. Wives used to patience stood aside whilst their husbands attended to their last duties on this side. Fresh country lads, the details of various regiments, trooped through, some grinning fatuously in their excitement, others with mouths agape and tears behind their simple eyes; some were stolid already from the hardness of life, some weakened with the stress and strife of it; more grown strong in the wonderful mill. Audrey had no eyes for the grizzled veterans who *knew;* it was the boys and the women who had yet to learn who seized and held her.

She made Larry wait while she gathered their pain into her throbbing heart, and let the sad procession of their faces write itself indelibly upon her consciousness.

Larry looked at her.

"I say," he said almost roughly. "You must drop this. How are you to live at all if you go picking up other people's troubles in this reckless way? You have enough of your own, child. Everyone must bear his own grief, just as he must do his own job. It's all in the day's work. This will make men of these youngsters and teach their mothers sense. The nation's got a bit soppy."

"Well, really," said Audrey. "I never thought I'd have to have such a word applied to me."

"It was applied to the nation, and not to you."

"Don't prevaricate, Larry. I thought tribulation had improved you, but it hasn't. You've taken even that small consolation away from me."

"No, Audrey, I haven't. You can stick to that, anyway. I'm not quite the fool I was, dear, or the bounder.

I'd take better care of you now than I did. I haven't much to boast of, but that's true, I think. I'd give a good deal to be able to wipe all that off the slate. When one stops playing and begins to live, one sees things different, and there's one thing certain: you can wipe nothing off that's ever been written on any slate. It's got to be worked off somehow, of course, but it wants more than a sponge. I've found that, and it's my job, Audrey, this; not yours, thank Heaven!"

"What's the use of treating me as if I were a passive, lady-like sort of person, Larry? I've never been passive in anything, and very rarely lady-like. I've more brains than you, my good boy; we're equal partners in this job, as you call it, and always have been. We've both got our work cut out for us.—This is a nice cabin, Larry."

"It's ripping! They've given me one of the best. You'll do your work like a brick, I know; but, only for me, it would have been the light, every-day work of any woman, not the up-hill, grinding game it is. We're *not* equal partners. It's the part of a man to look after a woman, and I wasn't a man; that's all."

"But I was a woman," said Audrey, with calm finality. "Be reasonable, Larry; I've never been a cipher in that or anything else. For myself, I find my own sins quite enough without trying to sneak other people's. Some people are never satisfied. Will you write from every stopping-place, Larry?"

"Of course I shall."

She stood up and looked out through the door.

"I wonder if you'll be nice to those boys, walking up and down to show their uniforms, instead of talking to their mothers, or if you'll snub them? Don't snub them, Larry; the most foolish things are wise enough to be hurt. If you saw Macmahon! Goodness! and he's so ugly! There's an immense salmon-coloured freckle on the very tip of his nose."

"You look as white as death. I'm going to get you coffee or something. You'll be all right while I'm

getting it, Audrey? You mustn't get ill now. If I thought that——"

"Do you think I'm quite an idiot? Go and get the coffee, do!"

When he had gone a great dry sob broke from her, the anguish of her heart flooded her small delicate face. She seemed too fragile for struggle so fierce. "I wonder if I shall ever see him again?" she said. "I wonder if this is the way in which we must work it off? A sponge, indeed! No such luck for the likes of us. That's not the way they do these things, I'm beginning to think."

"Oh, Larry! how quick you've been, and with the brandy and spoon and all complete! I wonder if you'll keep up all your bad habits, besides me, on the veldt? I've been your worst habit, Larry. A whole life spent in shedding bad habits and vices will be rather monotonous, don't you think? I wonder what repentant sinners fill up the holes with? You couldn't keep a stagnant tank of repentance in your inside. It wouldn't be wholesome. What will you call me, Larry? Your aunt, or your first cousin once removed? That's in the prohibited degrees pasted up in the church, so it's all right. Have some coffee? It's our last stirrup-cup, and my true love and ever, and it's you who should be drinking it, not I. Vicarious suffering is bad enough, but vicarious stirrup-cups must be worse for the other man! I think I must be getting good, Larry. I can't smoke."

"You'd better come up. My stable companion has just come on with half a dozen belongings in tow. Say good-bye, darling."

"We said it that day in town. That was the death-bed parting of the poets."

"Oh, Audrey, don't!"

"Oh, Larry! Larry! Good-bye!"

"Oh, my own! I wish to God——"

"I'm glad we love each other, Larry; I can think of nothing else now. Oh, Larry! I'll always be sinfully proud of you Stop wishing, and go on—on—on! *I* shall

presently. Don't be the least afraid. Presently, Larry, when I'm rested, we'll both be going on, and you'll be marching to the sound of drums, and I'll hear it. Good-bye."

The other man, with his crowd of satellites, all twittering like birds, came in as they went out.

"He's dissipated his affections, that man," she said, "and learnt much wisdom. He keeps it all in his outside pocket, and will have the greatest pleasure in passing it on to you; you'll have a cheerful voyage. It's the safest way, really; it's what you should have done, dear, instead of starting a past at your age! Come and see how the boys are getting on, and the mothers. Oh!" she said, as they leaned over the side of the boat, "look at all the swaying white faces looking up for the last good-bye. It's like a sea of sadness, and the monotony of it! Neither hats, nor clothes, nor feathers, nor figures make the smallest difference—the same stream of sorrow is flowing through all of them, and they've all grown exactly alike."

"Come, child!"

"Larry, send me a list of all the details, and I'll watch their names. I belong to that sea, you see, and the more I know of vicarious suffering the less I like it, and the awful way it will keep cropping up!"

"The last bell, Audrey! And the last good-bye!"

"Larry! Go on! on! on! Never stop, and presently I'll keep step with you. I'm not going to be outdone by the likes of you! Don't flatter yourself, Larry!"

She stood upon the fringe of white faces, erect and smiling to the boys, who stared at her; but to Larry it seemed that the stream of sorrow which flowed in rivulets and runlets through all the rest of the livid crowd, gathered itself together and flowed in full flood to Audrey.

For of all women he had ever known, Audrey had the greatest heart.

CHAPTER XXVI

MACMAHON was safe at last, slowly labouring on towards convalescence. The boy had been snatched from the jaws of death by the sheer audacity of ignorance—of that there was no doubt. The rest was hopelessly mixed up with a riddle of a mouth, and two blue eyes, which cast conflicting lights on serious subjects.

"The mystery of womanhood is beyond the conception of any sane man," said the specialist, at the end of his final visit, "but when it's complicated with the half derisive inspiration of a most delicate devil it's best left alone. I have always suspected the devil of being purely feminine, now I know the supposition to be correct. A crammer's wife to be sure! If I had a son I'd send him to her!"

"My wife has decided not to send ours," said the general practitioner with commendable solemnity.

"Mrs. Lambert is no doubt wise in her decision, but we're as God made us—mere men!"

"She sent the aunt away weeping with gratitude, without seeing the boy, and warded off the rest of the family by the same methods."

"And she has given a lift to two reputations, and preserved a pupil intact to Antrobus. A Napoleon in petticoats! I should like to know that she was happy."

"Happiness is the privilege of the commonplace," said Dr. Lambert, quoting from his wife in one of those moments of "divine discontent" which so frequently made his house unbearable.

As he drove back to the station the specialist smiled the

hollow smile of long cultivation, but he was sorry for the other man.

"He might be happy here, too, in these free airs and wide spaces," he thought. "It's hard enough to grasp happiness in the eternal sadness of the streets, and in the conflict and despair of competition, but it must lurk somewhere, surely, in this whispering heather, with no rival within a radius of five miles and a serious wife. But it's the same with him as with all of us, I suppose. His happiness is locked up in the tender, inexorable, impracticable heart of a woman, for it's she, after all, who holds the happiness of the world, even as she holds its life. And six new gowns last quarter," he groaned, "and Heaven alone knows how many bridge debts!"

"And she's quite commonplace, really, poor little Ada! Thank Heaven! I detest domestic sphinxes! I must try and find some other way with the poor child! Happiness is, after all, the least commonplace of possessions."

Audrey had that curious effect on men. No one who ever looked at her but wanted to be happy, and to give a little happiness to some other wretch, and at that moment she was sitting on a green seat in the sun of late autumn, thinking that no one's sorrow had ever matched hers. Nevertheless, she was laughing a little. Having pulled herself together, and gathered her wits, she was just going to tell Adeline about the baby, with the reservations necessary to the narrative.

The situation had its humours, and all the dolours of humanity and all the horrors of hell could not have hidden them from Audrey. And yet it was mortal pain to her to befool Adeline, an unspeakable affront to the dying woman, an unspeakable degradation to herself.

"If only the righteous knew the malignant meanness of sin and the vile advantages it takes of you," she murmured, "they'd all be so full of sympathy for the sinner that they'd coddle her up as they would a baby." She stood up, and went slowly on. "And that would be

extremely bad for sinners, I suppose. But—one is so lonely!"

The long nursing, the stern control over mind and body she had been practising day and night, the melting compassion that, in spite of her rigour of self-command, would keep flowing out to the ugly lad, Andrew a deepening bruise in her heart, Larry lode-star and death-stroke in one, the terrible problem of the coming child, and now this news she bore were weakening even Audrey. The day was hot and thunderous, and she had been neglecting Adeline. Since the day of the new life she had never once been near her.

She walked slowly, firmly, resolved not to be tired. She called in at a farm on the edge of the park, and had a glass of milk, and a look at the latest baby. She soundly shook three boys who were worrying a weasel, and tried to induce a fat and well-liking tramp of tender years to join the army. By the time she reached Adeline she felt greatly restored.

Adeline had now grown very fragile, and rarely sat up, and as she lay passive, her muscles and nerves all happily relaxed, her free spirit flew in and out and sanctified the airs about her. Audrey was far too sensitive not to be aware of some subtle impression, far too artistic not to appreciate the rare excellence of it. It was an enchanted air, and made her feel lonely and aloof. She felt like some intruder in a shrine.

"Oh! Adeline," she cried. "Couldn't you feel nice and wicked and understanding for a few minutes? This isn't at all the welcome I expected after a whole fortnight. What have you been up to? Not turning ritualist surely, after all these years of simple gospel. There's a subtle suggestion of incense in this room, or have you been setting up a secret still in your inside? What is it all about, you dearest of dears?"

"I've been waiting for you, dear, and thinking of you, and it's been so long. I wondered if you'd ever come!" She lifted herself weakly on her elbow to look at Audrey.

"And there is something—I knew there was. What have you to tell me, Audrey? Don't be long, dear. Your spoiling has made me exacting."

So Audrey told her, with the necessary reservations. It seemed so sacred a thing to Adeline, so exquisite and new, that her white face flushed, and she hid it in her thin hands.

"I knew that it was something great; I knew you were going where I could never follow you! I've been feeling so out of your life lately, dear Audrey, so small, and of no account. Nothing has ever happened to me; everything has passed me by! It was quite natural you didn't come, dear. I see that now, but don't let me feel like a stranger to you again, dear Audrey, for so long together. I'm too old and ill! You've made yourself too necessary to me, and I have so much time to think now, and to clear my brain, that all sorts of things are becoming so plain to me, and they're all about you."

She stretched out her hand for Audrey's. "Even now—even now, with this wondrous thing come to pass—even now, Audrey, I know more certainly than I've ever known that you're different—quite different from anyone I've ever known, and in a dreadful, dreadful way, but now I can't condemn you," said Adeline, with sad, deprecating eyes; "I—I can't even pray for you, Audrey," she whispered, "as once I did. I can do nothing but trust you, and trust you, little Audrey. I hope I may be forgiven if I do wrong."

"But you're doing right! Oh! Adeline, keep on trusting me. Just exactly the way you're doing. But why did you make me feel like an outcast at your door when I came in first? Don't do it ever again. Even if I committed all the sins in the Decalogue, we belong to each other, we two. You can't get out of it, poor Adeline! It's your cross—and one of the little ironies of life. The thought of it has bucked me up in many a whity-brown moment. And don't make too much of the baby. It's a human sort of commonplace, really, that happens to

many. Babies are difficult enough, without making them worse. Besides, swamping them in transcendental imaginations bedewed with tears, and emotions unfitted to their constitutions, might give them colds. Adeline! I wish you wouldn't cry! You wouldn't like to give a poor baby its first cold, dear darling, now, would you?"

"Oh, I wonder what's wrong with her?" thought Adeline. "You've been to Southampton, dear?"

"Yes, to see a friend off, and Andrew came to see me off. Andrew's rather wonderful in his way, Adeline. You'd be quite safe in idealizing *him!*"

"Andrew doesn't want any idealization."

"Well, no! I suppose he doesn't. That's why he's never been half so interesting to you as I am, and why you don't think of him half so often as you think of me. It calls out all the forces of your mind to keep me up to the mark in it. Andrew's assured perfection calls for no laborious effort. Your imagination just falls about him in a reverent sort of hush. You may, with perfect safety, even fall asleep. Andrew's all right, anyway. Do you think it was because God got tired of Archangels that He made men?"

"Oh, Audrey!—and now!"

"Now tea is ready. It hasn't been like tea since I deserted you—now, has it?"

"You know it hasn't, child."

"I don't believe your affection for me is at all good for your soul," said Audrey when Adeline's tea was finished and Adeline made cosy. "It's a bowing down to wood and stone quite unworthy of your bringing up. It ought to make you very kind and forgiving to other people who sin more or less in the same direction."

"Audrey!" said Adeline with softest reverence. "How does Andrew take it?"

"Andrew," said Audrey, with an elfish glance, "takes it beautifully. And now I must distinctly tell you that I'm not going to have that baby used as a moral bomb. I'm doing my best to take it in the right spirit, and babies,

I assure you, can be very full of complications, and so can the spirit in which they're taken. When Macmahon comes back from his holiday I'm going to bring him round to see you. He also is a person in serious need of idealization, and you can be doing it while I'm otherwise engaged. You must get better, Adeline. Between me and Macmahon you'll have your hands full.

"You're used to self-sacrifice, Adeline," she said, as she was putting on her gloves; "so even if it hurts you, you must keep on living. If you didn't, I'd be so lonely that some day, some day I might—make a mean sort of fool of myself, and it's low to do that, don't you think?"

For the next ten minutes Audrey talked nonsense at the top of her speed.

CHAPTER XXVII

ANDREW, never failing to hold himself at precisely the right angle now, laboriously watched over his wife, and the more heavily he watched over her the more lightly did she slip away from his understanding. He could not understand her; he had never been made to understand Audrey before her fall, but after it she completely confounded him. She was as incomprehensible to him as she must have been to Katharine had that spinster known anything at all about her. His love, of course, could know no shadow of turning; Audrey was his, to hold in his heart for ever. It beat only that it might be her habitation; it went softly that it might not hurt her frail, imprisoned wings; for what was he, after all, but the jailer of an idea? the shelter of a shadow, the substance bound to other laws than his?

He could not understand her! Could he have perceived one tear in her eyes, one quick, fearful change of colour, one stoop of her proud spirit, or her beautiful head, in recognition of that which she had done, it had been easier for Andrew.

In the nursing of Macmahon, indeed, after some consideration, he had found real sacrifice of self. Those days and nights of anxious watching meant much to a tender woman. But, Macmahon dispatched on his holiday, he had entertained a painful, yet eager, expectation of some breakdown on the part of Audrey, and when nothing of the sort took place he was more filled with consternation than before.

Even in woman in a state of innocence, outside the

scholastic profession, tears and blushes and breakdowns had been, in Andrew's secret soul, so much a part of her birthright and constitution that they had become almost necessary to the solidarity of his mental equipment. Thus he could make no way at all in his effort to grasp Audrey in her new *rôle*.

Her pauseless, unswerving, onward march! her unimpaired vitality! The gay insouciance perennially present in the energy with which she managed her household and the men and boys who composed it! The exhilarating effect of her bright presence!—her brilliant face!

Andrew had never juggled with facts. If Audrey was Audrey, sin was sin! He could have followed her humbly to any depth, and as humbly led her back, but she could not alter facts for him.

As she soared upon gallant wings, he toiled lonely along a tired earth, and one day in February, as Larry was going out to take his first chance, Audrey's baby was born, and Audrey lay at the point of death. Her flight had been too swift and sure perhaps, her defiance of God and man too gay and *débonnaire*, or it may be that her sorrow had been too heavy for one so light, for now all the powers seemed to be taking their revenge on her. She lay on the borderland of appearances, and babbled out all her secrets; and Andrew, whose honour was Audrey's, made over all his work to his subordinates, and mounted guard over her.

He came out in a new character, and an extremely troublesome one. He turned out the nurse whenever he possibly could, and kept even the doctor at bay. Andrew, sitting like a spectacled dragon beside her bed, gave rise to innumerable embarrassments; he became a most aggressive nuisance.

He never once looked at the baby, even to resent it; but Audrey, oh, God! how he loved her!

For three days and three nights he never left her, but sat in enthralled anguish, listening to the artless out-

pourings of the mixed mind of a woman. Sometimes he could not believe his ears. The holding capacity of this frail, child-like creature was apparently illimitable. Heart and brain, the impious negation of both, the eternal conflict between spirit and flesh, God and the devil, all found an ample place in the being of Audrey, and each, in its kind, was transmuted in the astounding crucible of her mind.

She forgot nothing and nobody—not even him. He seemed to be mixed up in everything, even in Larry. She was as constant to her duty as to her sin; she had not the heart to leave either out in the cold.

Andrew felt bowed to the earth under this weight of new knowledge. It was too hard for him. She knew nothing of failure; she had no conception of the curious abstraction that good women call sin—still less of the vital significance of that concrete thing that she had done. The consequences of her act, it is true, appealed plangently to Audrey. Her weak, trembling plaints, the echo of a shuddering laugh in each, cut Andrew to the heart. The bitter little cry of her loneliness, her shattered pride, her sad and bitter mockery of him, as he had judged her so full of surprise, as she nursed Macmahon, her derisive protest against the vague instinct of Norman, and the unconditional trust of the boys, although even now he did not understand the half of it, rent the heart of Andrew.

He learnt a great deal of Audrey, however, and of the sources of her actions. She seemed to have read the hearts of all of them like a book, and her own heart seemed big enough to hold them all—in one way or another. More than once Andrew found himself blushing like a girl.

The only happening in which he was wholly cast forth was in her renunciation of Larry. That was for Larry alone. Nor had he any part in Adeline.

He had always been deeply grateful for Audrey's kindness to the dying woman, but he was amazed and abashed in the face of Audrey's affection for her, and her absolute

claim upon Adeline. Above all, in her tender, mocking judgment of the nebulous saint!

The conceptions of Audrey were extraordinarily true, her judgment in all things, save the one thing, unerring. She knew nothing of sin, or of the indelible stain her exquisite soul had suffered. She knew all things, sweet Audrey, save how to repent!

Possibly the disturbance of Andrew's presence held at arm's length the calm of death, or perhaps Audrey was bound too closely to this warm and definite earth to leave it too readily for any cold, indefinite, supersensual refuge. Andrew had but little to do with her return; he was there to guard and not to claim her, but at least he was ready to welcome her back with a transport of joy on his quiet face. She shut her eyes to keep him out, while she collected her swooning senses, and in her weakness she followed the habit contracted in the silence of the last few days, and spoke as she thought.

"So I've been dying, have I?" she whispered. "And you're as glad as *that* because I didn't. And now you look guilty in the old way. What have I done this time?" she sighed. She frowned, and looked round feebly, trying to remember.

"And isn't there something—something else?" she said at last.

"There's a baby—somewhere," said Andrew, getting very red, and feeling guilty all over; he had forgotten it for three days. "I'll ring. The nurse will know, perhaps."

Audrey was trembling as she looked at him, and the elf in her was apparently still alive.

"Do ring, Andrew! Perhaps the nurse may know."

As the baby came in, Andrew went out—a desolate, childless man, and upon some strange impulse Audrey stretched out her arms with passionate desire for that she had never wanted.

The nurse mutely thanked God. Mr. Antrobus's reception of his first-born was a scandal. Ever after, the

very name of mathematics was anathema to Nurse Donne. She classed them with the other occult abominations, condemned alike in New Testament and Old. She profoundly regretted the rash act which had landed her in a community of pure intellect, heartless, soulless, without God in the world. For those of Mrs. Antrobus's ravings she had been permitted to hear had been anything but reassuring, and she had not been given time enough with the patient to restore her heart with love, and service without love is a severe dispensation. Audrey found it so, so as soon as she could lift her eyes from the distracting bundle at her breast, she set to winning over her caretaker.

Mrs. Antrobus was always only too ready to make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness.

"But I've done all the right things," she pleaded. "I nearly died, and gave you all plenty of sensations, and I've saved your conscience from no end of a swat. If I had died, feeling as horrid to me as you've been feeling, it would have given you fits, I can tell you. It's an old acquaintance, you see, that conscience of yours. I know its capacity. I'm not going to bring up my baby in that acute way."

"Dear Mrs. Antrobus! do just be a woman!"

"But I'm being only too much of a woman. I've got a baby, and I'm completely under your thumb, and I've upset the whole household. Do you think it's going to be a means of grace, this small, flabby thing?"

"That will depend, Mrs. Antrobus, upon its mother. A baby, at least, ought to have love, and a warm welcome. Will you forgive me," she said, with an irrepressible burst of bitterness, "if I hope that it may never be a Senior Wrangler?"

Audrey wriggled, and looked curiously at the child.

"Make your mind easy, nurse," she said; "it will never be that. And mathematics haven't hardened my husband's heart," she said; "they've made it extraordinarily soft; but a man can't be bothering about babies when he

thinks his wife is going to die. It's only women who can do half a dozen things at the same time. Men are born specialists."

"A first child!" said the nurse implacably.

"It would take too long to explain," said Audrey audaciously.

Then, laughing brokenly, she huddled down in the bed to think of things.

She would gladly have forgotten them, and have thought of her baby. The helpless red thing made her ache with an idiotic eagerness. She wanted to absorb herself in it, and let the rest go, and start fair again with the baby; but it was no use, they had all come back.

The day Larry went she had, as she thought, burnt all her boats, and come back to Andrew upon one little spar, but now it seemed suddenly as though that had only been the beginning of the burning, that there were still fleets of boats to be burnt.

"And after giving up Larry and breaking my heart," she moaned, "and working as I've done for all of them! It's sickeningly unfair! And Andrew never once to look at my baby! And to go out as it came in, looking as I ought to have been doing, I suppose; being an example to me, as usual, in his fiendish way!

"As if Andrew could judge of Larry and me!" After a minute she chuckled. "And, after all, how could one expect him to look?" she thought. She drew the child closer, and breathed more quickly, and presently two fever spots burnt on her cheeks.

"You can't expect to be an inspiring object to poor Andrew, you unfortunate little thing!" she whispered; "and you'll never be a Wrangler; and I'm glad; and I ought to be ashamed of myself for saying it, or even for looking at your dearest, ridiculous little red face, but I'm not, and nothing will ever induce me. You're all that's left to me. You're my one single thing—mine and Larry's!

"And I could have had everything, and people"—

people was a convenient word, comprising God and Andrew —"seem to forget that to me," she said with mounting excitement. "They forget everything but the one thing! And now, to have to be ashamed of you! I wish one of the jury of matrons who'd be judging me to-day if they had the chance had one themselves, and they'd know then that there's a limit to meekness. Oh! little beloved! to have to hide you under the blankets when Andrew comes in! and to have him standing there, being afraid of you and me.

"I can't be ashamed, you little wonderful child! I can't!" she said, feverishly. "And you must just explain yourself to Adeline while I sit tight. One way or another, you'll need a lot of explaining to the righteous. And to have to be ashamed of you! It makes one sick and giddy. It's too much to think of when one's ill! To be ashamed of everything—even of helping poor fools to get well," she thought wearily. "And for saints and angels to dare to judge sinners and all that poor sinners have to put up with! It's—it's wicked presumption! If one of them had to try even for half an hour to be ashamed of her own, own baby—not that I am!—but she'd succeed, no doubt, where I fail."

Whenever the nurse came near, Audrey shut her eyes, and even her stirrings were never violent, so apparently there was no need for anxiety, and Nurse Donne knitted and thought of the dangers of overmuch learning and a frivolous heart.

"Even if I turned High Church and confessed, it wouldn't hide the baby! or explain him, or anything. You're just mine," she said, "you poor little thing! and if you live till you're eighty you'll always be in Andrew's way! A nice mess I've got you into, you poor, little thing!"

An overpowering weight of helplessness suddenly fell down upon Audrey, and a curious desire to smother the poor little obstacle to Andrew's content. A quick uprush of cruelty from some submerged deep ran like a red fire through her, a primitive cunning awoke in her eyes.

She looked out furtively at the nurse, her pupils narrowed, she laughed noiselessly, and her delicate fingers closed round the little neck; but even half-crazy Audrey was not made of the stuff to hurt helpless things. She shuddered, and passionately kissed the child.

But she was confused in the agony of her wild defiance; Andrew's etherealized face haunted her. Her pride had suffered change, her joy in life, which refused to be beaten, was yet harassed and assailed at every point, menaced, broken, and all the colour of life had gone with Larry.

And now to have to try to be ashamed of her baby was the last straw! She lay mute and forlorn; when suddenly her brain grew clearer, her heart beat more slowly, and a new idea came creeping in. It grew and grew in significance, in reason, in power, and after a few minutes' thought she felt sure that it was her one alternative. She grew quite calm and almost happy again.

Death in the desperate circumstances was far the best thing for everyone concerned, not to be compared with the fag of trying to be ashamed of your own baby, always—as baby, child, boy and man—for years, and years, and years! It was so easy—death! It did not stand in constant opposition to you, and begrudge you even one little baby. She had tried all the difficult things to square matters; she had spared nothing, not even Larry—certainly not herself—and now to be asked to be ashamed of her baby by people who knew nothing about it. That was the limit!

"Dying is far easier," she said, huddling down dreamily. "It's nice. It's like going down, down into some curious place, where people know everything and are always kind. It's quite easy, baby! So come along! We'll hurry—you and I—it's no use to make two bites of a cherry."

With her failing strength, she held the child closer, and with the same light heart with which she had defied God and lived, she now proceeded to defy Him and die.

"I wonder why on earth He made the roses!" she

said, when she had rested a little; "but perhaps it was long ago, and He's forgotten."

"It's the easiest thing I ever did," she said presently, looking up with mad, amused eyes at the nurse, who, distracted, sent for Andrew, and in his usual extraordinary way he took all the pleasure even out of dying. No one could die in peace looking at Andrew. He was so helpless! He must always be one's first thought. In a saintly way Andrew was extremely selfish; to disturb her now, when she'd arranged everything so nicely, and squared it all!

And to have to be explaining all this to Andrew, when she thought she'd done with words—words were so stupid! just like Andrew! As if any words would ever explain the pang of trying to be ashamed of your own little baby!

She stared at Andrew's face of anguish and perplexity. "They seem to be whirling about—the words to explain," she said, and exerted all her remaining strength to make the matter more clear to the wretched man. She recapitulated her reasons for her early death in the faintest voice, but with partial coherence, and a glimmering sense of the humour of the affair. She often sighed. Andrew did not look inspiring; he was worn with anxiety, pain, amazement; haggard and unshaven. He had no comfort at all, poor Andrew! When Audrey left him, God had gone also. He was back shivering on the icy breast of Evolution. Yet, stripped of faith, hope, love, paralysed by fear, helpless and ineffectual, Andrew was wiser than he knew. He was so forlornly at her mercy that Audrey could do no less than come to his rescue. Had she been in her grave, smothered in flowers, she must have come back to Andrew, as Andrew looked then. He exasperated her into activity; he was a challenge no woman could disregard. A man could have looked out for himself—but Andrew!

Even hours later she was still too weak for definite explanations, and neither coherent nor polite.

"What on earth made you look like that?" she in-

quired. "Dying was so much easier! What's going to happen to all of us now, I wonder? Andrew, do go and have a bath and shave. I'm not cross, but really!—— And I'll not die. You won't give me the chance—and it was so much easier—oh! ever so much!" she repeated; "and I've given up that, too, for you. Talk of self-sacrifice!" she muttered, with a crazy smile; "and it's all your fault."

A creature like Audrey to find death easier than trying to be ashamed of her baby!

Andrew, alone in his room, cowered and hid his face; but he looked more sane when next his wife beheld him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE more Norman knew of Andrew Antrobus, the better he liked him—his proud humility, his humble pride. The unflinching determination with which he tried to accommodate himself to his new environment, his expanding intelligence, the almost woman-like cleverness with which this abstraction so uninstructed in common things laid himself out to do his duty, and to induce others to do theirs, his simple and sedate methods to entrap unwary minds, fix floating ones, and bring to judgment those who funked.

Andrew was plainly sending out shoots in divers directions. The odd thing was that in the one direction which was no affair whatever of his mathematical master, he was apparently lying fallow, under the nipping hand of some untimely frost.

There was some mischief afoot, and Mrs. Antrobus was no doubt the centre of it. To look upon Antrobus as the centre of any mischief were inconceivable, to conceive of Mrs. Antrobus as the active element in some vital mischief were inseparable from one's first thought of her, and it kept her alive in all those that followed.

Some change in the constitution of the mischief had taken place that day she had gone to Southampton, of that he felt sure. There had been no mystery about the jaunt. She had talked of it before she went, and kept them informed in many of its details upon her return. She looked pale and uncomfortably pathetic that night, but her bearing had been admirably self-contained, and no one down to the dullest boy could lightly forget her. Her gentle voice, her vital, graphic words full of signifi-

cance. Her simple, moving description of that rocking sea of white faces; the forlornness of all sorrow upon those that were left, the triumph of all hope upon those that went. She said little things that night with an inconsequent laugh that must find a home in any boy's heart and fire his spirit. This light woman! this quickener of souls—herself soulless!

He could not understand her any more than Antrobus could, but he knew too much of Mary not to know that something had happened that day which set Mrs. Antrobus, and probably her husband, high above the compassion of the most impertinent.

Still, no woman has any right to be wanton and saint in the same breath. She disturbed cosmic proportion.

She chained the imagination, however, and invited speculation. No enterprising mind could keep her out. Moreover, she was a fund of most valuable information, and when a man has had the luck to strike a crammer's wife with as much genius for self-revelation as Mrs. Antrobus, and with as obliging a disposition, a sudden drop back into reserve upon her part is not playing the game such as it should be played by an expert of her high order.

"And considering the way she keeps our noses to the grinding-stone, too," said Mr. Norman. "I've worked in my time to develop half-baked asses, but I'm hanged if I ever worked as I work now under her all-seeing eyes."

He thanked God for Mary, but felt glad that he knew Mrs. Antrobus. He decided at the same time that for the present she did not want him. "When she does," he reflected, "she'll let me know. It would be doing her a profound injustice to suppose that she doesn't know far better than he does himself when a man means a thing. I'm there when she calls. Meanwhile, I'll steer clear of her."

This he accordingly proceeded to do in the nicest way.

Audrey knew very well what he was after, and one day in late March, on the edge of the wood, she told him so. "But why?" she said. "Do tell me all about it."

He laughed and looked at her. "You're hopeless for tea-parties," she said; "you haven't played bridge for months; you can't be turning Mary over in your mind the whole of every afternoon, comparing her with me entirely to my disadvantage. You're training that dog into semi-imbecility. Those boys must have some light relief, and I thought that I could always be trusted to supply that much, at least, to the establishment. Now tell me."

"You knew that I was here when you wanted me."

"That's not enough. You've never been the least in love with me. You disapprove of me a good deal. You know nothing at all about me, and you like making incursions into the unknown."

"Even a man can practise self-sacrifice on occasion, or be rather more selfish even than God made him. Sometimes he will forego a pleasure rather than suspect himself to be in the way."

"I like constant friends, so full of trust that they could be in your way all day long without knowing it. I'm glad Macmahon is back."

"So am I. Never met a fellow like him for keeping you up to the mark. I felt myself going slack in his absence."

"That's a nice effect to have on people, but it would be nicer, even in your absence, to be able to urge them on to superhuman efforts." Her shining eyes were fixed firmly upon someone very far away. Before Mr. Norman could think of Mary he sighed, which is a misfortune that may overtake any man.

"Pity that sort of spirit isn't more rampant this side; it might hustle them up over there," said he.

"Women want victories without bloodshed," said Audrey serenely. "You should listen to tea-parties on the war. They buck up when a man comes in, and try to look Amazonian in a nice way, but when we are alone!"

"Women aren't shedders of blood by nature; even the shedding of honest and necessary domestic blood causes them real sorrow. My mother is an excellent housekeeper,

and yet the perennial slaying of poultry causes her an inconceivable amount of secret agony. She has never seen one of us going off to shoot or hunt without a gay send off and a secret shudder. She looks upon England as a select little island sitting in her own seas, under the direct supervision of God, and she has three sons at the war."

"I'm sorry! Oh, I'm sorry for your mother! She's the woman who makes good sons and good soldiers, but she would never be sorry for people all round, as women not the least good might be. I'm glad for her sake that you only like me in—a sort of scientific way. I never come within the circle of your meditations without a microscope hot on the heels of the vision."

This observation Mr. Norman passed.

"Women have a lot of time to be hurting themselves in just now," he said, "knitting queer looking things that must surprise many a raw recruit."

"That sort of thinking doesn't hurt," said Audrey unkindly. "It stretches their imaginations a bit; that's all. It wants more definite pain than that from a woman to spur people on to be great, and it wants more all round understanding from her too. Being a mass of fears and feelings and affections all in a tangle isn't much good when a country gets itself into a tight place, and must have the blood of men. Nothing will get it out but a willing sacrifice—the blood of men and the tears of women."

Her breath came quickly in a sudden, abrupt way; her eyes were flashing, her cheeks scarlet. "One—one wants to see things—as they are," she said, frowning, as though to disentangle her own confused perceptions and speaking softly as though to herself. "To know all round; to be a man yourself, without ever stopping being a woman, to be of much use as a woman when everything and everybody are in tight places. And it's a grind."

With quite incredible swiftness her breath came naturally, her face regained its airy calm.

"I wonder," she said, "if there are many men now

who'd bind their only son hand and foot, and lay him on an altar to kill him with their own hands in obedience to God—to something—who knows what he's about, whom you can absolutely trust?"

The little frown was again drawing in her brows, but her eyes were shining oddly.

"There are very few men left who'd do it; but there are some women, and you're one of them, I think, Mrs. Antrobus."

"Oh!" said Audrey. "Oh!" They walked on in silence for a minute.

"You don't at all approve of me," said Audrey. "You wouldn't like Mary to know me, or your mother; I wonder why you say that!"

"So do I, but I know it's true; and it's true, too, that I don't want Mary to know you or my mother. And yet —I can't answer for my mother—but under no conditions of which I can now conceive would Mary ever bind her only son and lay him on any altar with intent to slay.— If later on I were a sufficiently brutal brute to Mary, of course Heaven alone knows what mightn't happen!"

"Mary won't have a chance, so you'll never know whether she'd do it or not. But no one ever in all my life has been a brute to me."

"There are other weapons finer and more keen that God in His mercy puts into the hands of men for the perfecting of women, and they turn out more finished work."

"Dear me! What a nice Bible conversation we're having! I'll tell Adeline. She'll be so full of thankfulness. Since you enjoy excursions into the unknown, Mr. Norman, couldn't you take Macmahon for your field of inquiry? You know as little of him as you do of me, and he'll yield a quicker harvest to expert cultivation, of good, clean English wheat. It's the only sort of grain, you understand. And Macmahon has another advantage. You could introduce him to Mary without a qualm."

There was a long silence, full of the youngest sounds,

the small shy presages of spring. The unformed, uncertain note of a robin filled with vague expectation, sprayed down on them from a thicket of hawthorn and lilac. A rook rustled tentatively in his last year's nest, the melting of thin ice in a corner of the brook made tinkling melody. The solemnity in the submission of the waiting trees had given place to a look, as it were, of ardent passivity. They looked ahead now to life, not as they had so often done in those hard months of disillusion, back into death.

It was the sort of day when sudden little lights spring up in the hearts of men.

"If you ever really want to know Mary," said Mr. Norman, as they came up to the steps, "I'll write to her by the next post to come as soon as she's packed."

"I'm glad we're friends," said Audrey, "and that you were never in love with me. I wasn't sure at first if I'd altogether like it for a continuance, but I do. It's what I want. I've never had a real friend before—a human one, I mean. Adeline's not quite human, is she?"

He thought of her a good deal that night, and came to many wrong conclusions about her and some right ones, which is as much as can be expected from any man whose pride has never suffered fall.

Larry, with his advantages, was more sharp-sighted; he was now seeing things in Audrey he had never even suspected. He read things in her letters hidden to herself; he saw her on the road to some transformation of which she knew nothing.

He was learning his "Book of Women" in an informing atmosphere, in the silence of wide seas and spaces, the stress of a great purpose, and the alert, attentive senses of a man consciously on the road to consciousness. He found out a lot about Audrey in the starry nights, and he found her the best book in which he had ever spelt out life, taking things altogether. All that he had ever wanted he found now in Audrey. She was his—one with him; he could leave her now out of no part of him, so close and indivisible were he and

Audrey. Sometimes when hope receded and the sense of doom crushed down on him, and the horror of limit came battering at his door, and the eternal, insatiable prayer for life, more life, broke into an agonized cry, and his being was rent and torn in the fear of even potential non-attainment, the fear which destroys men, the thing that gave him reassurance was Audrey. She was the light upon his path by which he saw himself and her, and saw them both illimitable. As he learnt to know himself by the light she shed, he was learning to know her also, and the knowledge ran in and out of his letters and blankly confounded Audrey. Larry was beginning to talk to her in another language to that she knew, and she had no key to it. She could not make head or tail of Larry. He exasperated and dismayed her. He routed from their lairs and brought to the surface submerged things within her that persisted. She had to deal with them, to try to find out about them. They excited her curiosity. They made her afraid, and there was one thing about Audrey that could never change. She never turned away from anything she feared.

So now she often found herself brought up sharp before many a simple utterance of Larry's, ashamed.

She had never blushed for her sin in Andrew's or Katharine's acceptation of the word; but she blushed now, hot with tingling pain, at Larry's appraising of her goodness.

Sometimes she hid her face. The shame she could never conjure up for her poor baby, the innocent creature in her arms, her sin and the symbol of it, seemed now to be all centring in herself, tearing up all her foundations, and growing—growing—growing, breaking down every defence. And the more clear-cut she stood out in Larry's letters, the more it grew.

Larry's idiotic idealization was bringing her up against some new recognition. Everything seemed to be converging to one point, and that point herself.

Audrey had never neglected herself; that charming entity had always interested her. She had always found

it so full of paradox and variety, that she felt sure it must interest any reasonable being. With certain exceptions, she had always found herself a pleasant playground, and, as we know, the blighting shadow of guilt had not seriously affected her outlook.

The horror and desolation of the sense of separation born of sin had never visited Audrey, and even such sorrow as she knew, passionate, insistent, and sincere as it was, could not break down the barriers which divide. The eternal pain which lies in truth was still for Audrey to suffer. Never once in all her life had herself bored Audrey, and no woman could throw herself with more abandonment of interest into other people's affairs. Within and without, the ever-pursuing presence of her own personality was an engaging obsession. She could create an alluring atmosphere in the most adverse circumstances, and persuade herself, honestly enough, that therein lay reality; at any rate, enough reality to ferry her across the moment, and she could generally draw everyone else into her own delicious mirages.

She was essentially social, a builder up and not a destroyer; and now to have subtle forces working destruction in all her outlook was hard and inconceivable, and that they should come, too, from Larry's hand! Instead of making things more secure for her, he was making things totter, filling her with the most extraordinary sense of doubt, of fear, of instability. Wants she had never wanted floated wild in her miserable mind. Ground that she had always felt to be sure enough for her light weight, seemed to be sliding and slipping from under her feet. Her standard of values, so sufficient hitherto, had lost all value, and it seemed to look to her for readjustment.

"But what is it all about?" she asked a great yew hedge, with her odd little frown between her brows. "What does Larry want of me? What does everything want? Why am I bombarded and hustled by everybody when I'm always doing things for them all? I never stop."

The last two hours she had spent being an angel to Adeline, and she had given up a party in town for it. And now the mail had come and brought Larry's letter full of demand. What did he want of her? What did any one want? What did she want herself? That was the worst. Something not herself, but closer, was demanding even more than Larry and the rest. It was demanding day and night, it never let her go.

She had always been able to get away from herself if she wanted to, but she could not shake off this *Doppelgänger* to make one shudder.

She used to delight in herself and the ways of her going, just as she did in the sun, and the stars, and the first spring flowers; she had been just as dear to herself and as impersonal. She could appeal to herself in such a variety of ways that herself had never tired her; it had brought her so near dear, tender things, such pure satisfactions, such assurances of needs that she alone could fill.

Her joy in her own being was pure in its way; it might have been the joy in a primrose looking out from its nest by the roadside to the answering joy in some seeing eye. And to be harsh to such a dear and intimate and joyful self as this! and that the enemy in the gate should be Larry! She panted with some mystic apprehension. She was angry with Larry and with herself. Her breath came in rough gasps; it hurt her throat. Hard, odd, dry sobs broke from her.

"And, Larry, to hurt me like this!" she sobbed, shivering and swaying. "Oh, Larry, how can you? And—and—considering all things—the impertinence of it!"

In some awful and incomprehensible way herself had laid its hand upon Audrey. And Audrey, so fine and delicate, was being broken and ground at last in the slow, implacable grasp.

"But it's Larry's fault," she said, throwing up her head. "If it's not Andrew, it's Larry. I—I—don't think I can bear much more.'

CHAPTER XXIX

THE baby dropped quite naturally into his little life, and suffered in no sort of way from his environment of pain and responsibility. Nothing could damp the ardour of the creature, or temper his zest for life. He took everything that came with something of his mother's gay courage. Full of faith and assurance, he made his demand upon his small world, resolved to be on the best terms with everybody; he scattered his smiles and his goodwill alike on good and evil. Never was seen a baby with so universal a mind. The spirit of conquest throbbed in his blood.

It was impossible to Andrew's sense of duty to avoid the child. He accepted him fully, as he did everything else, and the smallest pretence of noticing him was enough for little Loring.—With fine magnanimity Andrew himself had chosen the name, a family name of which he was justifiably proud. Andrew did things thoroughly!

Perhaps in gratitude, perhaps for some other reason which lay in his own heart and God's, the baby pursued all his advantages, and insisted upon the attention of Andrew. He would not be denied. He rarely cried, this vital atom, but he crowed and chuckled; his eyes were Audrey's, and the sceptre of innocence was in his hand.

His attitude to the miserable man was a challenge not to be disobeyed. In the presence of a pure soul the still voice of harmony commands the air, and shame is transmuted. The loftiest moments of Andrew's sad life, those that came nearest peace for his weary soul, were

the brief instants he spent daily receiving in silent wonder the extravagant advances of Carfax's child.

He had begun the habit for Audrey's sake, and then somehow he and the child had filtered into it, and the visits became an inseparable part of his lonely life. There was no familiarity on the part of Andrew; he never touched little Loring. To all seeming, he was the most detached object of Loring's experience and of the nurse's —she was a good woman, and described him even in her prayers as a stuffed image—but noticing one day the joy of the child as the sun glanced upon the glasses on his side, for ever afterwards Andrew let him play with them. But never when Audrey could see him did Andrew go near the child, chiefly for Audrey's sake. He was studiously anxious, so far as in him lay, to protect and guard his wife, and, at least, he could make unnecessary the soul-twisting sensations she must necessarily experience should she behold him occupied with her son. The potentialities of suffering conjured up by Andrew were probably never experienced in their entirety by any human woman, perhaps not by any human man; they were more than likely part of the contents of Andrew's own peculiar make-up. But Audrey was labouring with too many other half-conscious potentialities of her own not to be partially aware of them. She knew all about the visits down to their smallest details. She took the most absorbed interest in them, and her own sensations in the matter were quite as much, as with her present capacity for pain, she could reckon with. She wanted none of Andrew's fancy touches; she had enough of her own. Andrew's shy pride kept him remote from the nurseries; he performed his sacrificial rites in the grounds of his old house, which was full of *caches*, and Audrey a born stalker of game. Very rarely did Andrew stand in passive contemplation of her child but Audrey saw him, and the tumults and torrents of confused and elfish mirth and misery that these vigils of Andrew let loose in her, no one but Audrey herself could describe.

She was torn with sorrow and with a wild revolt from the hideous necessity of some inexplicable continuity in everything. Her heart beat against its bars; she lifted her defiant head against the world. She could have killed Andrew, and fallen in a rapture of passionate gratitude at his feet; but try as she would, she could not be ashamed of her baby. She did try; she tried hard. It seemed to be the one thing that Andrew in his secret soul demanded of her, that something vaster and more imperative than Andrew was demanding also. It was in the tissue of the flesh of Audrey to please people. So she tried as hard as the like of her could try, and signally failed. The child was inexpressibly dear to her, and it was hers for something better than to be ashamed of. Her baby was not a thing to hide and ignore, whatever else might be.

In her recoil from this ever-recurring balked endeavour Audrey, who could never be a bubble in the stream of events, but must always be making or marring history, bestowed on Andrew a new form of torture, by flaunting round the baby amongst the boys. There were now some fourteen or fifteen of them, all of whom, in his kind, adored Mrs. Antrobus, and Mrs. Antrobus, as the mother of a "kid," aroused much astonished interest. The "kid" in itself was an object beneath the notice of any self-respecting person, but being one of the assets of your crammer's wife, put another complexion on the matter. Naturally one had to humour Mrs. Antrobus in her queer tastes, and to look, at least, as though one shared them.

Women speak volubly of the decadence of good manners in boys, but let any one of them watch a knot of boys whose inevitable duty it is to admire a baby, and the object-lesson will strike her dumb.

Macmahon was furiously jealous of the baby; yet even *he* was lifted above himself as he beheld its mother, and felt sure her eyes rested with peculiar significance upon himself.

"Don't have 'em at home," he said quite glibly in his

exultation; and one of them safely precipitated into speech, the tension in the air grew less.

It was Mrs. Antrobus's first official tea-party at which the baby was present, and the discomfort in her visitors had naturally been acute. It was a rare occurrence for Macmahon to take the lead in anything. A vibration of surprised appreciation reached him from the others, and puffed out by the novel sensation, he recklessly forged on, fully conscious of a fatuous grin upon the faces of the rest, the exciting cause this time *not* himself, whilst *he* looked very much as usual.

It was a spiritual experience Macmahon never forgot, and Audrey, in her quick way vaguely sharing it, of course smiled at him like an angel.

"Haven't much use for 'em in most places, I should think, judging from what one hears," he said; "but this one seems to fit in. Never struck me before a baby could, y'know."

Every man in the room admired Macmahon, and wondered where he got his knowledge and his volubility. Several carefully approached the nurse. One ravished by some queer memory, made an explosive and sepulchral noise with his mouth, and Macmahon, still first favourite, discreetly talked it down.

"It must keep you amused, Mrs. Antrobus," said he.

"Amused!" Audrey laughed. "Amused! Oh! that's the last word! Little you know. A baby isn't a doll to fool about with, I can tell you. It's not the least like what it seems to be; it's a far-reaching sort of thing, involving a lot of things and people. It means hard work."

"It means a lot of money," said Thornton, with such stern conviction, that Mrs. Antrobus found out later in the afternoon that he himself was suffering very seriously from babies. In order to make practicable the yearly arrival of one in his own family, he himself had been fobbed off with a hopelessly inferior school, whilst two of his

juniors hovered even then on the verge of the pit that had engulfed him. The illuminating appearance of a specimen of the fatal species had threshed him for the first time into articulate protest. Audrey went considerably out of her way, and employed methods anything but holy to save the other two urchins from their elder's fate, and, as usual, she triumphantly succeeded.

"If it was only expense," muttered a rich young man destined for the cavalry; "but that's a fool to fits and croup. They've spoilt the Christmas holidays for three years on end, and it was measles at Easter."

"Oh! they have a lot to answer for, poor things," said Mrs. Antrobus. "They're always interfering with the amusements and the points of view of men. It's well they've got women and their own unconsciousness of offence to protect them. They don't have fits or give them to other people to please themselves, you see; but since they're in the world, they've got to behave like human beings. It's their—er—'categorical imperative.' I've been reading extracts from German philosophers, Andrew. Won't you have more tea?"

The quick recoil in Andrew's eyes when he caught sight of the amazing addition to the tea-party had roused in Audrey the usual wild storm of pity and revolt.

"No, thank you, and I've a great deal to do, Audrey, to-day. I am afraid I must leave you now."

As he looked at her, avoiding the baby, he flushed in his maddening way.

"And expecting me to be doing it, too," she thought angrily; "as if I could, with so much to attend to! As if doing the correct thing in repentance—for Katharine, say—would in any sort of way suit me, or alter anything! And to fly from the baby with only half your tea, and Andrew a philosopher, I suppose, since he's a genuis—it takes the heart out of you.

"You're all despising the baby in your hearts," she said in a clear voice that could not fail to reach Andrew's retreating ears. "You forget that he's only a few years

younger than the rest of us, and may get his V.C. sooner than any of you."

"He probably will with you at his back, Mrs. Antrobus," said Macmahon, with a mouth full of plum cake.

Here one of the others jogged his elbow, and sent a crumb the wrong way. This occupied him for some time, and gave the rest a chance. Now that the road was cleared, they were getting full up of Macmahon, and, Mrs. Antrobus having victoriously waved the banner of her pretender in the face of him to whom alone it mattered, promptly dismissed nurse and baby, and there was more scope for rational conversation. So now the room hummed with vital memories. The crude searchlight of youth was turned full on, and beneath it, men as trees, stalked to and fro, before the amused attentive eyes of Mrs. Antrobus. They were larger than human, and smaller, these unconscious specimens, for time alone will focus the sight, but they lived and spoke. A boy like a woman will make a shrewd shot at the sources of human action, and, like her, he is limited by his experience, and his charity is as scant as his knowledge. He has not yet looked round the corner, nor, as a rule, has she. There were splinters from a thousand boys in Audrey. She threw off, with an immense effort, every burthen that oppressed her, and lived each moment as blithely as did the boys.

Andrew, vaguely conscious that he had hurt her, came in half an hour later, felt the throb of excitement in the air, looked at her face without one afterthought alight with it, and dumbly went out. Mr. Norman came in for a belated tea, and so exultant was the atmosphere that even his official presence carried no weight. He drank his tea and became a spectator of the play.

It was an atmosphere of perfect liberty. Vainglory, cruelty, prejudice, self-seeking, irresponsibility, justice, candour, generosity, honour, faith, hope and charity—all rubbed shoulders; no hatred whatsoever seemed to exist between the highest and the lowest. They were all old friends together, and all joined hands to realize the whole.

With an artless grin high crimes of conduct were brought to light, devious stratagems unearthed, unholy victories admitted. It was immensely to the credit of Mr. Norman that he never moved an eyelid. He wondered, however, that Mrs. Antrobus did not. As a man, he naturally expected it from a woman. He did not know—what man could ?—how near together a boy and a woman not yet "stabbed into life" can come.

And yet the woman innate in Audrey kept the balance even. She neither belied herself that merry day, nor did any one of the boys. It would have been impossible with Audrey there. Poor Audrey! who had belied her soul and wounded the world. But boys came in amongst the helpless things and were safe in her stained hands.

Mr. Norman knew it well. She had not spared him; in sheer mischievous abandonment she had, from time to time, used all the weapons in her armoury on him, and would do it again to-morrow, in spite of Mary, and of her sincere acceptance of his friendship; do it, too, with the most unabashed and wanton enjoyment, but that day the inevitable weapon of her sex became in the cunning hands of Audrey a silver trowel to build up men.

"She's beyond me," he mused. "I wish I could afford to marry Mary."

When the last boy had filed out, she appreciably relaxed, motioned to Mr. Norman to remain, stretched herself as unaffectedly as a young beast of prey still innocent of bloodshed, and laughed.

"A whole afternoon of it! It takes it out of you!" she said.

"It might out of another woman. It doesn't out of you."

"As if you could possibly tell."

"Who am I to answer for any woman ? It's you yourself who speak by my unworthy mouth; that's all. I only know you by what you've told me of yourself and demonstrated to me. You're very honest and very candid; you've never spared either yourself or me."

She sat up to look at him."

"I wonder if you thank God after praying for Mary that He's delivered you from me?"

"I haven't gone the length of that, but I'm glad it's turned out all right, and that I can always be your friend. I'm very proud of the office, Mrs. Antrobus, and I might have been jolly well ashamed of myself if I'd been only your slave, and perhaps on the strength of it made a mess of the establishment. A fellow can't carry that sort of thing about with him and do his job. Something must go by the board, and it would never be you!"

"Well, no!" said Audrey, lifting her expressive eyebrows.

He put his hands on his knees and laughed at her.

"And you're better pleased yourself that it's—as it is. You like these fellows too well to injure them in the most trivial way."

"Or injure Andrew."

"We'll leave Antrobus out."

"It's impossible ever to leave anybody out."

"I'd give a lot to have a close and uninterrupted view of your conscience, Mrs. Antrobus."

"So should I," said Audrey, with emphatic sincerity. "It would be sure to be a most interesting conscience."

"It would, if it exists. I'm not sure yet that it does."

"Perhaps," she said, "it's a wandering star that's not settled down yet, and only appears at intervals. If only we could catch it and domesticate it, we could pore over it for hours, you and I together, and find out no end of things. Mary wouldn't mind, since it would all be in the interest of science and friendship; and if she did, we'd make her sit beside us with a note-book, and register the variation in the violence of the pricks. It would be a liberal education for Mary and a new profession for women."

"No woman so simple at heart as Mary and so tender could bear to watch such pain as you would suffer, Mrs. Antrobus, and no man living would have the courage.

He'd fly for his life. We must all three prosecute our studies apart."

"You know very little about me if you think I indulge in secret internal castigations, for I don't"

"Wait till the need arises."

"Oh, well, you're generous. You think there's still a chance for me! It's a new reason to be glad you're still young; you offer a nice wide field for internal disturbances. You take the privilege of a friend. I'm rather off friendship if that's one of its tricks; you're not at all complimentary."

"I paid you the biggest compliment I could."

"You do believe, then, that women have souls? I met a man lately who said they hadn't. I wonder what it would feel like to have a soul? It would be always swelling up in you and spoiling your figure, don't you think? and might in the end make your seams go crooked. You could never wear tailor-mades."

"You take material views."

"So would the tailor in the circumstances. One must consider others in all things. I wonder if you'd like seeing me tormented inwardly. There are great and good men, I think, who would like to watch a woman repenting slowly and painfully in sackcloth and ashes. Now that's so different from me. If a man did anything to me, and I forgave him at all, say, for trying to murder me or any other light little crime, I'd hate to see him torturing himself for his past sins, and getting hollow-eyed and narrow-chested and out of step. I'd much rather he'd turn his back on the regrettable occurrence, and go on! on! on! doing his living—oh, well! perhaps a little better than he did before."

"A man strong enough to turn his back on his past will never do it till he's got out of the past all that he wants; till he's made it serve him and not master him; and it won't do that till he's forced it to give out to him all the good in it; above all its toll of pain, for pain is alive, if anything is, and it's more life that every man wants."

"You're determined to make me squirm."

"I was thinking of the man, who proposed to murder you, and the way he'd got to work it out for his good in the end. And you can't refuse any fence, you see, if you want to keep up with the hunt. And you to talk! Catch you sneaking round after gaps."

"You're all the same," she said. "Men have no right to demand the pain of women."

"They have every right to demand consciousness for women, and pain comes in with consciousness."

"But she needn't always be writhing. She may have a little spell of peace while she's doing her duty, a very unpleasant one sometimes! You all want a great deal too much. Over-swelling souls and nose-reddening tears! It's unprogressive and early-Victorian. The idea of a poor woman being expected to suffer just to prove she's got a soul. It's a sort of incense to the pride and vainglory of men. It's far better to put things behind you and go on; and if you made people uncomfortable yesterday, do your level best to make them comfortable to-day."

"It's a fine philosophy, but it won't bar out pain."

"Your state of mind isn't at all nice for a man engaged to be married. I'd like to exorcise it with a violin solo I've just composed, only I've no time now. I've got to do one or two of the unpleasant duties that you seem to think worse than useless. To long to be watching a woman in a horrid hot hell wrestling with her sins, instead of making up for things on the nice cool earth, is an awful state of mind for an engaged man. I'm sorry for Mary."

CHAPTER XXX

NOTHING could damp the spirits of Audrey for very long, or curb the velocity of the wild challenge of her temperament ; but there were things in the letters of Larry that now became very disturbing. Quiet, manly stable things, new outlooks on life, a new interest in it from the new points of view, a quiet forethought for the child, to whom he had left a large sum of money and an unentailed estate, in a way that could hurt no one—all these things disturbed her oddly. It was the mounting trust of Larry in her own goodness, however, that completely confounded Audrey, the way in which he insisted on accrediting her with the simple, old-fashioned goodness of old-fashioned women at which she had so often laughed ! She could not drive his ridiculous ideas out of her head. They kept her awake o' nights. And if they all went on harrying her in this sort of way her health would give way ; she'd get wrinkles, perhaps her hair would turn grey.

Larry seemed to be in league with Andrew, with Mr. Norman, and the boys, with some inward demand and some outward pressure all directed upon her, with the sole view of making her uncomfortable—more uncomfortable even than was inevitable in the circumstances.

Discomfort, moreover, was in the air. A miasma of apprehension was upon the land ; affairs in South Africa were going to the dogs. Men waited in a dreadful expectation ; the low voice of wailing was in the street—the whisper of mistrust. Fear, not of death—we had not sunk so low as that, thank God !—but of dishonour, cut

deep into the heart of the country. Weak women, grown strong in meditation, were now ready enough to offer their sons upon the altar in order to save it. Dead hearts came to life; sleeping souls awoke; the willing hands of old men rose up in anguished protest against their impotence. One hand of God lay heavy upon the blindness born of the material heart of England, the other pointed upwards to her heritage of light. Out there in the land of dreadful night some of her sons took one way and some the other. Her wise children leapt upwards to the light, accounting death as nothing before the significance of life. The others were merry in the darkness. And while all the papers howled, the tragedy went on, and England, in blood and sweat, learnt the ultimate lesson of all the nations upon earth· "Where there is no Vision the people perish!"

And into Audrey in her own poor little way was beaten, by day and by night, unceasingly, the same eternal counsel. *She* stood also in the shadow of the Cross, in the portal of the Great Suffering which guards the Great Records, and is the only Home of the Great Happenings, and she laughed out lightly into the bright air. Want of courage did not come in amongst her vices, and yet the desire to flee was in all her delicate flesh, and, lo! she could not move!

She could laugh, however, and jest and comfort, and inspire, and make the roof ring with her wild merriment.

During this time of strain and stress she was as sweet a sprite as ever aped womanhood. And not once since that extraordinary moment in which she thought to choke him, had the mortality of her child ever even struck her. He held her life, and Larry's, and the life and joy of the whole world. He was invulnerable in her eyes, the centre of life! Infantile diseases were void of all significance to Audrey. They might concern other babies, but hers never! And then suddenly one day the baby grew quiet. He lay in the nurse's arms and gazed out into

some region into which his mother could not follow him.

For the first time since he was born his life was apart from hers! She could not follow him! She said nothing; she did not look at his limbs or ask about his symptoms, or commit one sensible folly, but an odd little bell beat in her heart and her whole being stood still. Something had happened in some vast silence, within and without, and she would never be the same again.

She knew it, even then, and she was afraid, and bitterly angry for a minute. She could not even speak; but one can always laugh at least. So she laughed lightly, and tweaked a little curl of the golden hair.

"He's worrying about the Situation, nurse!" she said at last. "It's all right, really, little foolish one; England isn't going to the dogs. I know better than you can, at your age, so you must just take my word for it; so hurry up, and grow, dear darling, and don't get disheartened. Leave that for the poor old things who can do nothing, who have to wait in the chimney-corners. You have to wait too, Loring, but it's a nice waiting, full of events, and not a long eventless growl like the waiting for death of the old men in the chimney-corners."

In spite of herself she fetched up short, for who can tell the thoughts of babies? and his eyes had looked out strangely at his mother.

Perhaps he knew the pain of the shock, and even the pain of her glib speech, for directly after he began to crow and chuckle, but in a minor key, unlike his usual lusty note.

"Oh, nurse," said Mrs. Antrobus, accusingly, "you've been talking about Simpkins' young man before baby. Don't say you haven't! You have, and it's got on his nerves. I've always told you that babies must always listen to cheerful conversation, and not to the lamentations of cowards. Simpkins ought to be ashamed of herself—especially now that Hopkins is a corporal. She's not

worthy to be a soldier's wife; she'd better think of the fishmonger's assistant—she seems to spend a good deal of her time in confiding her woes to him."

"'Tain't her woes, ma'm; it is the corporal's good conduct an' the officers' praise."

"Oh, is it? it takes a long time to tell then, and seems to clear the way for the fishmonger's attentions. But she says much more than that before my baby. And how often must I impress upon you that your responsibility in choosing subjects fit for his ears is simply enormous. Babies require elevating conversation."

This had always been a startlingly new point of view to nurse, and although utterly devoted to her mistress, she was frequently respectfully perplexed by her.

"I think, ma'm, the baby is a little out of sorts."

"Obviously! I'll send Simpkins to the circus this afternoon, and if the fishmonger's assistant will take her, I'll gladly pay. It may make her more hopeful."

"Yes, ma'm," said the bewildered Moore.

"I wish you would open your understanding as wide as you do your eyes, Moore," sighed Mrs. Antrobus, "then there might be some hope of you. You're an excellent girl, except for your limitations, you know; but you'd be an extremely valuable nurse if you'd try to get the better of them, instead of looking on me as on one mentally afflicted."

"Oh, ma'm!—no, never, ma'm——"

"It's all right, Moore. I have the greatest faith in you, really. And if Simpkins does marry that miserable young man," said Mrs. Antrobus as she swam from the room, "for, as you all know, I've done my best to make him enlist—and with his shoulders and chest measurements to be hawking fish *now!*—I shall take good care that Hopkins, when he returns a sergeant hung with decorations, gets a girl worthy of him. And now, take baby out, Moore, and be sure to remember every single thing I've said to you."

"Oh, ma'm!" wailed Moore.

When she got to her room, Audrey's breath was coming

in little gasps, her knees trembled; but by sheer force of habit she fastened her hat with three pins, and directly she was out of sight of the house she fled down the yew walk, down through the pines, across the stream and meadows, making straight for the doctor's house. She must go herself! She could not rest—or wait! She must go on, on, on! but she was herself and no other when she met the doctor just coming out of his gate. She let him drive her back, and spoke half jestingly of the child, and her wish that he should see it. She told him merrily of several of her enlisting adventures; she was now scouring the county in search of recruits. They were laughing when they came to the baby in the grounds, and when she stood on the steps to say good-bye to him, she laughed still.

"She's the most insidiously radiant creature I ever met, and there's nothing the matter with the child. I foresee what I never dared to expect—an excellent client in Mrs. Antrobus. A baby is a marvellous leveller! Mrs. Antrobus as an anxious mother is indeed an agreeable surprise. I must tell Alice. It may enable her to look upon the poor lady, at least in some respects, as one does upon an ordinary human being. Hitherto there has been no platform upon which they could meet on equal terms."

Alice did call the next day, to learn that Mrs. Antrobus had gone to town to a bridge party! She examined the child, diagnosed hysterical folly on the part of his betters, and flounced home. So much for William's anxious mother!

The growing silence in the child and in everything in earth, and sky, and air, seemed to be choking her, so Audrey had wired to accept an invitation she had previously declined, and flown to London and wholesome noise, thus endangering a score of friendships, and putting her hostess to no end of inconvenience. She played until she had won £50, and with equal zest went on till she had lost £30, and righted the emotional balance. She demanded a chasse for her coffee and told some startling

stories with inimitable frankness and reserve, and then, as by a miracle, she swept out the tainted atmosphere of heat and corruption with a heather-scented breeze.

"Why don't you come back to us?" said a man who had known her since she was fifteen; one who had suffered a good deal himself, but had made others suffer more. "You were a baby Pan trying his pipes when you left us. Now you're the eternal youth himself, and by virtue of your sex something more. You left us before you found yourself or us. Couldn't you bring the cramming establishment to town?"

"It's better in the country and so's Pan. He can play there, too, and we can dance."

"He can play well enough in town, and we keep good time."

"He's better for boys down in the reeds by the river."

"May I come down and listen and be a boy again?"

He looked at her with bold admiration. She laughed, and her look was as direct as his.

"You've lost the way, you'll never be a boy again anywhere; we shouldn't know what to do with you, the boys and I. You'd silence the pipes."

"I've danced to them for eight-and-twenty years with creditable agility, in less expert hands than yours."

"But you don't know my tunes, and I can't teach you, my hands are too full.

"Don't come, please," she said, in the gentlest tone of command. "I'm on the very verge of finding out some new tune, and I want to be left at peace with the boys, and the reeds, and the rivers, and a baby. Did you know I'd got a baby?"

"How long will you remain at peace with the boys, and the reeds, and the rivers, and a baby, Mrs. Antrobus?"

"I don't know; I wish I did," said Audrey; "but, good-bye, and don't come. Good-bye, dear people of Babylon!" she called out to the room at large. "If you rumple up your foreheads in the fiendish way you did just now when a poor little country mouse picked up a

few crumbs from your overloaded tables, you'll soon be getting wrinkles, and you ought to be shedding a tear for her going back now to recoup herself for the subsequent losses by gleaning corn. It's not corn now, is it? it's potatoes; but, anyway, remember poor Ruth, and wish her good luck."

When she got home the baby had grown, she thought, one tiniest semitone more quiet, and the mail had come in.

Things were beginning to turn, and Larry to hope; he wrote in a flood of moonlight. His chance was coming, there was no mistake this time! Every bit of him that had been going dead for months in the hideous inaction, was coming to life in a way he had never felt before, not in the best run he had ever ridden, or the best game of polo he'd ever played, and with chances about, that sort of thing can't strike you foolish for the first minute, and in the next make you fit for anything, for nothing!

The chance was no nearer, geographically, than before; it lay not twenty miles away, behind a handful of little hills—as it had been lying all these sodden weeks—but now they were given their heads at last. They could look out at facts with their own eyes now, and walk comfortably on their own flat feet, and find their bearings unhampered by old habits and old fogies, or the devil himself turned old woman over there in the War Office. They knew where they were now, and having no longer any fools in authority to instruct them, could turn all their attention to trusting themselves; they had thrown off the yoke, and action was now the word. And no matter what happened, Audrey must train the boy to be a soldier, unless he turned out a hopeless skunk. A man must find himself sooner or later in soldiering, and even a skunk after a bit will get less of a skunk. He gets the hang of things; he lives! "You see things in the fellows out here," said Larry, "that you might search for all your life in a dull barracks at home, and never catch sight of. It brings them close to you in the queerest way,

You respect them and yourself in a new way; you drop on them worse than before, as it happens your eyes and your wits get keener in this air, and your head clearer, but I have less petty crime in my company every day, and I think it's because I know more of the men and can manage them better. The soldier is a fine fellow, and you're the best soldier I know, Audrey, little girl, far and away the best! You're always showing me the right way to take with everything. I often hear you clapping. To-night I can. It's you who make me take the right way with the men. It's you who will be with me when the chance comes.

"I have no cause to grouse. It's come already in a way. The colonel has recommended me for a D.S.O. They think me useful of sorts, and it's you—you, at every turn! But of course it is, since we're each the half of the other!

"This is not very moral, is it, with Antrobus a fixture? but it's the fact. We could never have been what we are, you and I, without each other. It's doubtful morality all right, and I've done with it practically, as you have; it doesn't pay if one wants to play a big game. It's not good enough for either of us now, and I know to-night just as clearly as if you told me, that you're finding the same thing over there amongst the Surrey hills.

"But you're finding it in a different way—a woman's way—poor Audrey! It's not so ripping a way—we've got the best of it always, I think—but I wonder which is the most effective way, yours or mine?

"My God! but I hate to think of your suffering, child, there, in the lonely house; and yet you must, you must! I can't take that over for you! It's not my job, and I can't fix it up for you. I wonder if it's fair. Everything seems fair to-night. Everything is in less of a muddle. You feel sure that it's all right—somewhere, and that you're on the right road; but to think of you suffering, and you the mother of my child! To-night this seems more wonderful than ever it did! I wonder if I'll ever see

him or you ?—but even if I don't, to know you're good is a lot.

"I've been sorry enough; I've suffered for my sins, I can tell you. Antrobus is a good fellow, and one doesn't like to go behind another man, good or bad. And the wrong to you, my own, the wrong to you! My God! but I've suffered!

"But to-night that seems done with, too. The one thing I know for certain is that it's done with, and we love each other, and that you're good, and my chance is at the door!"

He must have jumped up suddenly and blurred the sheet. It was very difficult to decipher.

"I could wander on all night," he said in a postscript, "but we've got the route. Good-bye, little Audrey! Don't expect to hear for weeks."

"But this is good-bye," she said. "It's my last letter."

The knowledge lay like a stone in her heart; she could not lift it.

As a rule her first impulse was to fight; above all, to fight sorrow, to crush the first premonitory symptom of its possibility, to refuse to believe, to fly to any refuge sooner than give in. But to-night she sat still and knew. She was trapped! To struggle would now be the act of a fool!

The letter came when she was giving them their coffee, and as he left the room Andrew gave her the evening paper. She knew by his kind, maddening look as he gave it, that there was some mention of Larry in it. Three times in the three weeks his name had thrilled every sentient heart in England, and sooner than not himself give her the paper Andrew would have died.

This was the biggest mention of all.

"He's having his chance with a vengeance," she said, "and I'm helping him; but it's hard to be a woman."

She crouched down beside the window.

"It's never been so hard before. I think this is the limit.

"I've always been less than a woman, so I've been able to go on—till now—perhaps that's it," she said presently. "But now——"

She shuddered, her fearful eyes looked out into the moonlight.

"I—I'm not afraid of ghosts, surely—I haven't come to that! I—I've done my best!" she cried out passionately after a long silence. "If Larry's done his job—so have I—we've done our level best, we two. And to-night every woman in England is crying over Larry and envying him for herself.

"And here am I—and there's Andrew, in the laboratory—and the baby getting quieter in his cot—and a good God made us all!

"And if this isn't defeat," she said, after a long moveless waiting, "it's precious like it. And I thought I couldn't be defeated," said Audrey, standing up at last; "it seems odd.

"And I wonder what's defeating me?" she said aloud in a thin, shrill voice from which anguish had wrung the richness; "is it God, or the devil, or what?

"Oh, well, I'll have to wait now for eventualities, and for news—like Simpkins, without even a fishmonger's assistant to comfort me, and read out of the same book with me at church. It must be nice for Simpkins, but what about Hopkins thinking of her out there in the moonlight?—and yet God made them all! Oh! for what! For what! For what!

"I suppose he made to-morrow, too," she said, "and all the other to-morrows full of waiting, with Larry doing, doing, doing!

"Even Andrew has his distractions. Oh! Larry!" she moaned. "Can't even *you* help me?

"I'd better go see baby and get ready for the next to-morrow God has ready for his poor little playthings."

It was her first sense of real defeat, her first sentient perception of mortality, and virtue had gone out of Audrey.

She was a little different. Macmahon suggested "Flue," and was surreptitiously kicked for his pains.

Andrew's heart stood still. His brain went plodding round a host of wrong causes until the doctor's arrival to see the baby put him on another false scent.

Audrey had not spoken of the baby's being unwell, and unversed in babies, he had perceived no change; but Audrey could not be anxious for nothing. He went, oppressed by a horrid diffidence, to look for her. He was so anxious to help and come as near her as the other man may. If he could not understand anything else, he could at least understand her loneliness, and there was a certain relief in finding some tangible trouble of which they could speak. He threw off his diffidence, and looked more like other people, and less like Andrew, when he came to Audrey putting on her gloves in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XXXI

"I DIDN'T know the child was ill," said Andrew, blushing in his usual dreadful way. He made the most strenuous efforts to overcome this desolating habit, but in vain; it grew upon him, and was the saddest of all the sad comedy of her life to Audrey.

"I don't know myself that he is," she said in the gentle way she always spoke to him. "If I'd been sure, I'd have told you. You're extraordinarily good to me, Andrew," she said, on a sudden impulse.

Andrew blushed deeper and stuttered. Some pit seemed to be swallowing up all his words. Audrey felt, in a way amusingly unlike Andrew's, and much more unpleasant, every fluctuation in Andrew's sense of guilt in regard to her and the baby, but she never blushed.

The perennial exasperation and horrible hurt of it all, and she trying so hard to please him! Above all, the dumb appeal of his quiet, inquiring face, and with her own affairs in the state they were! She moved from one foot to another and stifled a sigh.

"Perhaps he's not ill at all," she said; "but one gets foolish."

"I—I understand."

She finished her last button and sat down.

"I'm going to take baby to see Adeline. He won't be ready yet. There's plenty of time. Andrew, won't you sit down? And you don't understand. You understand nothing but going on being good in your own way. I wish it didn't make you look old and ill."

Andrew was hopelessly unready; he hadn't a word.

She wriggled.

"If the boys and the experiments aren't enough, if they can't fill your time and thoughts, couldn't you try—er—realizing your *ego*, Andrew. I've been reading it up. It seems an absorbing pursuit, one that would take up the whole of any man's spare time, and you haven't much, really. It seems able to erect a sort of ring fence around people strong enough to keep out any intruder."

Andrew looked rigid with surprise. He was the least encouraging person Mrs. Antrobus had ever tried to influence.

"Oh! it would suit you exactly. You have to be so desperately in earnest about it. It'll never pay you to be desperately in earnest about me, Andrew, and all in the wrong way. If only you'd turn your attention to the other things! I'd feel less horrid if you did, Andrew—less of an obstacle. I've never been an obstacle to anyone yet, and I don't want to begin on you. Oh, Andrew! not on you, of all people!"

Andrew had not recovered sufficiently for coherent words, and her face was very moving to a silent man.

"I want you to be going on—like the others."

"How many?" he thought. "How many?"

"Not hanging round the things you were never made to understand."

He wondered what things there were that he did understand. The dislocating sense of guilt for her from which he strove so vainly to rid himself was in full possession of him. Her point of view reached farther and farther—his significance in it grew more shadowy. He lived in her speculations—she in his heart! The desolating difference!

But at least his responsibility in her and in himself was clear and defined.

"And Kant and little light Audrey!" He groaned in the silence of his soul. "This child in morality! this exquisite symbol of unconsciousness!"

"If a man fails to understand these things, which above all else are his affair," he said, with the very oldest of his smiles, that which was more distracting to Audrey than any of the others, "he will fail, I fear, in realizing even the beginning of his *ego*. What has induced you to read Kant, Audrey?"

"One gets so tired of muddled brains at tea-parties, and now when women are all talking war and politics, I thought I'd try something which might sort out mine enough to get some idea as to where the muddle starts. One likes to know things. And there's a muddle in everything. It can't start altogether from women's brains or their acts. Besides, it's nice to dig into great brains in books; one doesn't get much chance out of them."

"Audrey, child!"

"I'm not blaming you, Andrew. It's our methods being so different, and the way in which we understand things and misunderstand things. I wish you'd go on, Andrew, and follow your own road, and let me find my own way out of my own mess. It's mine, not yours. Tracking *egos* is a more worthy pursuit for you, and it would make you forget."

"It would be impossible for me to forget you, Audrey, and hardly conducive to the search for an *ego*. That, so I gather, comprises the highest duty of man. I fear, child, that we must go on together."

She beat softly with her foot upon the carpet and sighed:

"Ah! you don't understand," she said, looking out into some region very far away from Andrew:

"I understand, Audrey, more than ever I did before, that in marrying you, *not* understanding, I did you an indelible injury."

"For goodness' sake don't be adding a new burthen to your load, Andrew. You married me from the very highest motives. How could you have understood me or anyone else, brought up as you were? I could have

taught you all about me soon enough if I hadn't been a beast. Couldn't we keep from going back, Andrew? Marrying me has been the best thing you ever did, really—except for the one thing. And there's one thing I want you to know: that's over and done with," she said in a low, steady voice. "And Larry wouldn't go behind you now by one hair's-breadth, not if I went on my knees to him. Larry's gone on—miles ahead of me. I haven't kept back Larry—and he a sinner just like me; and how could I want to keep you back, who'd be a saint if you weren't an Agnostic? I have some gratitude," she said passionately; "I want to play fair—and I wish you wouldn't be blushing when I'm as cool as a cucumber. One has no time to blush; one has to be doing, doing, doing. I wonder if things had been different—if you'd been the fallen sister and not I—I wonder just how you'd have managed the affair, and if in the end you'd have come up top any sooner than I shall?"

Her words came in a soft torrent. She would have forced a solid, sensible man only moderately in love into listening to her, not to say Andrew.

"Blushes have never been the least effective," she proceeded, "nor tears, nor standing in white sheets at church doors. Fallen sisters are very much where they were centuries ago, in the eyes of the respectable middle classes. They haven't moved an inch, really. There must be some way on, some way of progress," she said, frowning and tapping her foot, "even for them; some new way that isn't simply loathsome—for them, I mean, not for the rescuers. And if there is, one would like to find it. There's nothing without a future, not even pigs. There's a society just started to uplift pigs, to point them to the higher life, to show them what nice, fastidious creatures they are by nature—it's like making them realize their *egos*, don't you think—and that keeping on wallowing in styes is merely a misapprehension of truth."

"For God's sake, Audrey, stop!"

"But I can't; I have to, and I'm sure we don't often

have any rational conversation. There must be a way," she said, frowning; her eyes were full of the saddest gravity, her mouth trembled a little. "Not any of those faked up by parochial saints on the rotten foundations of personal inexperience. I've been asked to go on a committee for rescue work, and I will, just to see, to find out, and to make them all sit up. If you'd give up repenting for my sins, Andrew, and in just the sort of way Katharine would, if she had the happy chance of knowing about them, it would save us both a lot of horribleness; and some new thing might begin; one might see some other way." She waited, she ached for words—for any, the smallest that might ease the tension of her heart. But Andrew's feelings were too deep for words; the weight of centuries of right judgment on these matters crushed down all power of expression. She was so lonely and desolate; she would have liked even Andrew to touch her; but nothing was more remote from Andrew's diffident intentions. She sat looking at him, whitening slowly all the time.

"Only you'd think it indelicate—it's Katharine's word and must be wandering about somewhere in you—I'd give you Larry's letter that came last night. It would show you the way in which a sinner can be good, and think other sinners good, and believe in them down to the ground, in spite of everything."

By this time Andrew looked as though he would never speak again. Faint, yet pursuing, Audrey forged on:

"Larry has as little right to believe in me as you have, or less, because he knows more of me, and yet he thinks that I'm good, properly good, like other people. It's very curious to you, Andrew. It is to me, in a way." Her eyes looked out into a great distance, her mouth melted. She moved slightly towards the light.

Andrew was still searching for words, and a human expression, when she spoke again.

"I should like you to be at peace with Larry, now, Andrew, now! this minute! I wonder if you would

mind saying just once, Andrew, that you forgive Larry?"

Andrew stared, shrank together, blundered to his feet and stood stiff and half blind before her. She moved again and drew a deep breath.

"If only you'd say it once, even if you only say it in a dull way, only half understanding! It seems suddenly so extraordinarily urgent."

He stood immovable, watching her white passionate face, the entreaty in her tired eyes, the fatigue in her proud, young bearing. A spell was in the air.

All at once he shuddered in the horror of her self-revelation. He recoiled from her, shocked, estranged. Every inherited instinct rose up against her. For all their righteousness the Antrobuses had fought duels in their time for their women, had been implacable with the best!

But still the spell was in the air, and in this there was greater than Audrey to reckon with.

"It seems suddenly so urgent," she said in a low, clear voice. "I never even thought of asking you when you came in, or of saying anything. But I had to say it, and I have to ask. Oh, Andrew! Andrew!" She sat, white and trembling, full of a magical, transcendent appeal.

A strange sense of awe, of an infinite responsibility, was gathering in upon Andrew. The bitter, uncompromising anger with which his heart was full whenever he thought of Carfax—and, indeed, when did he ever forget him?—changed slowly to a generous, enlarged, fundamental desire to be just and fair; to try to see in all men, even in this man who had irredeemably wronged him, what at bottom he would alone see in himself. He fought stubbornly against the better mind; brutal passions rose up and defied him: Perhaps no man ever fought harder in his time than this poor scholarly Andrew Hidden resentments rushed out to oppose the outrageous demand put upon him; unknown cruelties battered at his heart; strong logic made stronger his brain. But

Audrey, and the truth in things as they are, stood unflinching in his path, and from his birth he had been well instructed in giving up. A settled habit of obedience can damn or save, as a man takes it, and there were other things which words clothe but scurvily, that fought in Andrew upon the angels' side.

"I forgive him," said Andrew at last, not looking at her, hardly thinking of her. The affair seemed now to be his, not hers, or any other's. "Yes, I forgive him," he said slowly, speaking as though to himself. "When it comes to the point, no man has any right to judge any other except by himself; I couldn't do any man an indelible injury, knowingly. It may have been equally impossible to Carfax."

For an instant Audrey looked breathlessly up in his ashen face.

"I'm glad," she said almost inaudibly, "I'm glad you've forgiven Larry. I'll be the most faithful right hand to you that ever man had. I'll stand by you in every way. I'll make your life splendid. And, in the other things—there may be some way. Perhaps one can square things in the end, square every single thing.

"Only—only—give me my head, and believe, and I will. It won't be your way, it will be mine, and—and I wonder, Andrew," she said, throwing out her hands in a wild appeal, "I wonder if you'll believe in it, or understand it, or accept it to the day of your death?"

"At least, I shall understand your loneliness, Audrey, and your great sorrow."

"Ah!" she said, "Ah! But—will you go on? Will you go on, Andrew? And, watching you will be helping me all the time to find my own way out."

* * * * * *

It was only the will of Adeline that now held her to life. She was very tired, and could have prayed humbly for death, but Audrey wanted her; so with even more chastened humility she prayed for life.

Her love for Audrey was so inextricably mixed up with the many seductive things that had passed her by, that it required stern spiritual exercise upon her part to keep her prayers for Audrey quite pure and perfect. The God who made the roses was continually slipping in, pressing back into silence the God who made the Law, so sometimes the conflict became rather too difficult for so weary a saint; so she had to throw up the sponge at last and let the God of the roses have His way.

And, after all, if Love is the consoler who melts the heart, he is also the sword who pierces the soul. The unifier and the divider. The eternal Two that know no division.

So Audrey was in safe hands in any case, and in some way, upon a day not given to her to know, Audrey would be both pierced and melted, and she not there to help.

She knew Andrew too well to trust him in this subtle matter. Audrey would have to stand up to a great deal alone. She had no doubts as to Audrey's courage, but many in regard to her discretion. And Audrey alone in the wine-press of God would be hard driven.

It would be a special happening, and Adeline would like to have had a hand in it. To be just for once paramount in the need and the determination of one human soul. She could have done great things for Audrey. She knew in her heart she could, and it would have made up for all her other misses. Sometimes as she lay and dreamed wild dreams concerning this fullness of fulfilment, she experienced a rounding out, an expansion, a blossoming of all desire, such as astonished her. Her heart beat like the heart of a young girl. Her cheeks tingled.

But she kept down her feelings whenever she felt strong enough, and blushed as insanely as Andrew himself could for her secret folly.

* * * * * *

Audrey perfectly turned out for a country walk, the freshest vision of dancing life, laughing and chattering,

was anything but a fit commentary upon Adeline's sacred vigil. She blushed again as she thought of it.

When Audrey had talked all the nonsense she had breath for, and had sent the baby to pay his formal respects to Katharine, Adeline was composed enough to see something in her eyes that annulled all thoughts of her own shortcomings.

The Spirit was, indeed, far enough from Audrey, but some sword of whose quality she was extremely doubtful, was even now in her heart.

"But what can it be?" she considered. "Audrey has a baby, and even if Andrew—— Oh! well . . . ." said Adeline, bridling. "But whatever it is, she won't tell me yet, and when she can——

"But I won't repine," said Adeline robustly.

"Audrey, Dr. Lambert says that everyone is talking of the way in which the boys are getting on, and how admirably you manage your house, and of how wonderfully Andrew has taken to his new occupation. And it's all you, dear. Dr. Lambert likes Mr. Norman greatly, but he says it's all you; that you are the moving spirit in everything—the point of life, he called you."

"Oh!" said Audrey complacently. "Oh, well! I don't think they could very well do without me—not now. It was my scheme from the beginning, wasn't it, Adeline? And I chose Mr. Norman. I've done my best," she said, speaking not to Adeline, but to herself.

"Child, you've done wonders!"

"And yet it's not enough. I might just as well have been enjoying myself in my own way."

Adeline anxiously watched her.

"If you had done anything less than you have done, or done it differently, I wonder where any of us would be now?"

Her face still confounded Adeline.

"It's not often one gets so many dreams fulfilled in a few short months," Adeline went on. "I never see one of those boys go up that hill——"

"For tobacco!" said Audrey.

"Never mind what it's for; but I never do without dreaming of his success, and Andrew's, and Mr. Norman's, and, above all, yours, little Audrey; and here are all my dreams coming true. No one could ever have prophesied it of you, dear Audrey," resumed Adeline, when Audrey said nothing.

"Oh, yes, they could, if they'd known anything at all about me," said Audrey promptly.

Adeline sighed.

"I know we don't understand you, dear."

"You understand quite enough about me."

"You've done wonders, and you've done all this, Audrey, you who love neither God nor"—she said slowly—"nor Andrew; it makes me feel such a failure. I have never done anything decisive in all my life, and yet," she added, getting very red, "yet I was converted at eighteen."

A dazzle of interest arose in Audrey's remote eyes. She was alive in a moment; she leaned eagerly nearer to Adeline.

"And you never told me that before! Converted at eighteen! At a given date something that actively happened. An event you can look back on, and count time by! It's rather fascinating. I thought that sort of thing just trickled in anyhow, and trickled out later on. But do tell me just what you mean by conversion?"

"I mean," said the poor woman, "I mean," she looked dumbly into Audrey's brilliant face. It had taken all her courage to speak out, to deliver her testimony. Never before had she dared to speak aloud of this miracle of a thing that had happened to her, and now to have to explain it and to such a face! Trembling and stuttering, she bared her poor heart, and Audrey was too absorbed to see that she was almost fainting when she had finished.

"Yes, yes," said Audrey, frowning. "I've read about such things, but I've never been told like this. They interest me. She lifted up her hand as though in search of something. Her foot swung more slowly:

"It's fascinating, you know. But that was definite enough, surely. Adeline, don't get struck all of a heap like that! Go on! do! It's immensely interesting. I believe conversion has a lot of names, and happens to lots of people. How can you say that you've done nothing definite?"

"But, Audrey," faltered the wretched Adeline, "you do nothing; it's—it's done to you."

The eager excitement in the girl frightened Adeline nearly out of her wits. It was so odd an outcome of the testimony it had cost her so much to deliver, and she had conveyed an entirely wrong impression concerning this wonderful thing to Audrey.

"It isn't definite, Audrey, as you count definiteness. Oh, if only it was!" she whispered.

"It's definite enough," said Audrey, nursing her knee. "It's a continuous, coherent sort of thing. It's like Kant tracking his *ego* and landing himself in a sort of abomination of desolation, where he sat tight and surveyed mankind with a steely eye."

"Child!"

Adeline lay back panting. All that she knew of Kant she had gathered from Katharine.

"Adeline! What on earth is the matter?"

"Kant!" murmured the poor lady. "He has been called—Antichrist."

"Who called him that?"

"Katharine."

"Oh!" said Audrey. "Oh! just like Katharine. Oh well! don't you worry about what I know of Kant, it wouldn't hurt a fly. And he was pretty cocksure about most things, but he wasn't Antichrist. There's a wonderful fascination about these things," said Audrey, beating a rhythmic measure on her knee, "in things somewhere or other ahead of you. Kant and conversion, for instance. It's what makes me like you so tremendously, Adeline."

"Dear Audrey!"

"You see," said Audrey dreamily, "something hap-

pened to you—and Kant, that never happened to me. Dear me! Couldn't you tell me more?"

"Oh, Audrey! it's so sacred! There are no words—at least, I haven't any."

"I've read words, plenty of them, but they've never struck me as you have, suddenly—and that unfortunate lonely Kant! It *is* interesting. I'm glad you were converted at eighteen, Adeline. I'm glad that you've gone one better than me, and know something I don't. Was Katharine also converted at eighteen?"

"Dear child! Katharine was always good."

"I know, but she wasn't converted at eighteen. It must have been a pretty big thing, Adeline, that made you more enterprising than Katharine on one memorable occasion. You must often feel quite nice and comfy having done a big thing that Katharine never did, and to know things she knows nothing about."

"Audrey! Katharine——"

"Goodness me! I know. She's an example, but you were converted at eighteen, and it's far more interesting. I wonder if I'd been converted at eighteen what would have happened."

"Even if you had been," said Adeline wistfully, "you couldn't have done better for us than you have done."

"Oh, couldn't I?" said Audrey. "Have you noticed anything about baby?"

"What do you mean, Audrey?" said Adeline, startled. "I think he's grown a little quieter. The doctor says he's a splendid child."

"And he thinks I'm the usual mother?"

"I think he's growing so like you. He's not like Andrew."

"Well, no!" Audrey picked up her skirts to warm her ankles.

"Adeline, conversion must have been a strengthening process. I wonder it didn't make you defy Katharine, and take a little stroll round the world on your own account, chaperoned by conversion. It was all you wanted to

make you perfect. I say! here's Katharine. Her step seems light and airy. A grave and contemplative baby would appeal to her. I'm glad you got converted in good time, and had the pull over her all these years, and had little hidden places of your own into which her spectacled nose could never, never pierce. I'll say what I like! You're far more mine than you are Katharine's.—Katharine, I'm going to make a soldier of baby."

"Indeed, Audrey! and Andrew?"

"Andrew's leaving these things to me, and baby's been born and bred in war."

"He is rooted and grounded, I am thankful to say, in a more stable soil."

"There are dozens of soldiers behind him," said Audrey audaciously.

"And of scholars not a few."

"Scholars don't die for their country."

"They live for it."

Katharine was too great and good a woman to quail before any platitude.

Audrey was not in the mood for Katharine, and in regard to her she had no fixed conscience. Katharine was one to be used as a screen upon which to throw the worst of her, and the child as he was brought in looked more quiet than before. Audrey's heart leaped up and almost choked her, and so Katharine being now the only temptation she could yield to with any degree of comfort to herself, she made ample use of her.

But during the whole of the unworthy skirmish she kept on lightly pinching Adeline's hand under her bed-clothes, so robbing the scene of all its pain for the poor bewitched saint.

CHAPTER XXXII

ONE day Andrew noticed the growing quietness of the child, and then Audrey felt quite sure.

"Would you like another opinion, Audrey?"

He watched her with great anxiety. She was almost as quiet as the child. She was as vivid as before, as full of reserves of life, but there had fallen a stillness upon her, and looking back, he saw that it had been growing now for many days. A vision of her as she had nursed Macmahon came back to him. Her defiance of precedent, the security of her hope, the self-assertiveness of her courage, the audacity of her claim, and now her state of almost passive acquiescence. He could not understand her.

"I don't want anyone but Dr. Lambert," she said; "no one can do anything for baby. He's tried life; he gave it a good trial, you'll admit that, but he's had enough of it—you can see! At least I can. Perhaps he doesn't approve of me, or of being an embarrassment in a general way. Anyway, he's had enough of it."

"Must you speak like this, Audrey?"

"No," she said, after a pause; "and it's cheap; but you're the only person I can ever speak the truth to, don't you see, and when one is being defeated all round one gets foolish, and doesn't mind hurting people."

"Can I do nothing, Audrey?"

"What more could any man do?" she said passionately. "You'd save the child if you could. You'd squirm in his embarrassing presence till the day of your death to save

me, and you've forgiven Larry. You've done a great deal, Andrew, and some day I'll be nice about it. Meanwhile, let me go on in my own way. You have no hand in these things. They're my affair, and we must all do our own job. This is mine all right, and yet I seem to have to stand aside now and let things work themselves out without me. I—I have to stand aside and let the child die! I have to be a cipher," she said, drawing her fingers across her eyes, "and let things happen. It does mean being defeated, don't you think?"

"My poor child!"

"I wonder why on earth Providence chose you as the centre of all these experiences, Andrew! It's not commonly honest, not to say decent, with your bringing up, and your imagination. You have plenty, but it's of the wrong sort. It's a clog to keep you back, not a goad to drive you on. If only you'll be good and kind in the usual way, and let me look after the impropriety in the situation myself. It's mine, not yours! If you did, you'd be a great man much sooner than you'll ever be, suffering tortures all in the wrong way for me. Go on, Andrew, for goodness' sake! go on! on! on! and leave me to scramble out anyhow.

"And even if baby were proper, Andrew," she said presently, "I wouldn't go into mourning for him, so don't let that be troubling you."

The usual dumb devil took hold of Andrew, and he retreated, blushing. But presently he walked down to the doctor, and between them they arranged for a specialist.

When he told her, Audrey softly laughed. "I know, without the specialist," she said. "I wonder when you'll begin to trust me in the things I do understand, Andrew!"

A week later the child died, and two days afterwards, as he lay, a little image of Larry in his roses, the news came.

It was important news, put in leaded type in the great papers, for the nation had lost a good man, and they were ill to spare.

"I should like to be of some use to you, child," Andrew stuttered, as he gave her the paper and went out.

When he next saw her she was standing beside the child's bed, almost as still as he.

"Oh, Andrew," she said, as soon as she saw him; "wasn't it lucky you forgave Larry—then? And isn't it odd—the whole thing? Every symbol of wickedness swept from our path with the neatness and precision of a Greek play. You're good—you're the best man I have ever known, except Larry, since he went on without me; but if he'd come home you'd have been haunted all your life with the gross impropriety of his continued existence. You'd have been blushing inside you all the time for me. And now you can go on unabashed."

"Will you think of yourself now, Audrey, and not of me?"

"Are you like Mrs. Donne and nurse, sort of outraged because I don't cry and tear my hair. I heard Mrs. Donne quoting, 'She must weep or she will die!' in a strangled voice to her dead baby. There wasn't any other audience visible. Did you know she once had a child who lived five hours and was a means of grace ever after? Oh! Andrew, I'm not ill, or mad, or anything; but one doesn't cry for a hero—one is too proud of him. And—baby—he knew what he was doing," she said, touching his little hand. "He was like me: he hated being an obstacle to people. I'm going for a walk, Andrew. Is that improper? Would you like to come as far as the gate with me for the sake of weaker brethren? Andrew," she said, turning to look at him, and standing up very stately and proud, "would you mind saying at dinner to-night that Larry Carfax was my best friend? It would be only fair to Larry and it would be fine of you. I shall be grateful some day, when I can be anything. This sort of thing—being defeated all round, makes you dull, I think. Don't blush when you tell the boys, please Andrew, or look guilty. It isn't fair to Larry, or to me, or to yourself." She paused, and caught her

breath. The perplexed suffering in his face tortured her.

"I wish there were words to say things in," she said at last, softly.

"To be sorry for a man like you—in common words—is—in a way an insult—and yet I am sorry in a way that is not an insult. Ah! It's very bewildering. No wonder you don't understand, Andrew. No one could but the person who's part of it all, but, at least, don't be thinking that I'm going to break down. I'm not. It's so senseless—just at the beginning of a new start."

"I shall do as you wish, child; I would gladly understand you if I could."

"You wouldn't be you if you did," she said gently, "and I'm glad you're you, Andrew; I couldn't stand anyone else, not now."

Audrey could always find her feet and her wits better out of doors. She felt both to be tottering, and that would never do.

Even in her extremity the cry for life was in her ears. She resented her benumbed weakness just as, in a like strait, she would have resented Larry's.

Besides, in a dim, negative way there was something afoot in her that could never be got through in the house near Andrew's dumb pain, and the hush of death, and the boys walking up and down on tiptoes in their poor, foolish sympathy.

It was this one little human thing that for one moment had freshened her eyes with tears.

She would have liked to have gone to Adeline, but she could not—not yet. She must have things out with something first. Even now, the nearness, the inevitableness of some new experience of pain, strangely excited this creature so alert for novelty.

She turned mechanically towards the wood, now a melody of all sweetness, but she shivered and took the other path. "Everything's spoilt," she said; "one is even angry with spring! It's not fair," she murmured,

hurrying along. "It's low. If I'm beaten, other things aren't, and I shouldn't be wanting to drag them down with me. I wonder what's going to happen?" she said as she sat down under a tree shivering. "What's the new hurt?"

She was on the hill above the old church, bathed now in sunlight, the very yews to the south of it were golden, the graves bejewelled.

Although the services bored her, she loved the church. She had made a dozen sketches of its square tower, with the curious old gable of black and white. In spite of the dead services, it was an alive place, full of the joys and the sorrows, and the hopes, and memories of a host of sentient creatures. It held both tears and laughter; it held passion and dreams. It was a strong and stalwart, a secret, and silent place of refuge for helpless things.

The beech under which she sat, uncurling its leaves in the sun, drawing in sensuously the rising sap, basking in happiness, was no place for the like of her. She sprang up, and just at her feet, in a nook in the hedge, was a great clump of primroses. They, also, were too young for her need. She was no longer part of them, no longer part of anything. She was thrust out of everything by the blow that had killed her heart.

"Nothing wants me," she said; "I'll go to church, and if Mr. Bevan sees me he'll be filled with fallacious hopes, and Katharine, if she's prowling round, with vindictive misapprehensions."

Avoiding the primroses and the great rows of beeches, all rapturously uncurling in the sun, she made straight for the church. She paused to watch the spears of light piercing the solemn darkness of the yews, and to pick a sprig of bay to wear for Larry.

For a long time even the hospitality of the bountiful church was given her but churlishly. She was more lonely than before, more dead at heart, and greatly distracted by the simpering smile of an effeminate St. George, who seemed to be coming towards her on mincing toes.

She was too forlorn to sit up straight in a pew. So presently she knelt down, and so sad was Audrey that she forgot to hitch up her beautiful skirt in order to save bagging.

She cowered down in the narrow, dusty pew, and in the pain of her desolation at last she fell asleep.

When she awoke a faint sense of twilight was in the air. One streak of rose fell athwart the altar from the setting sun. An early nightingale sang in a copse near at hand. The faint lowing of the village cows stole in, the crying and the crooning of the children.

Audrey looked up half dazed to listen. She knelt on, wondering. Besides the other sounds, the church was full also of the song of the bird, and yet the silence was unbroken.

There was a sense of hushed waiting, of expectation everywhere. Audrey held her breath. The dizzy whirl of her thoughts fell slowly into line. The little common sounds persisted. The bird sang on, and yet the silence was unbroken. She felt keen and quick again; the numbness had left her. "But what is it?" she said, waiting and listening. The bird sang on; the silence grew more deep.

And then all at once a rapture of life rose up in Audrey just as, outside, in the world, the sap was rushing to leaf, and branch, and bole, and rioting in the heart of all the little people of the woods.

She was as one dead who was coming to life, and then it seemed to her as if suddenly she was Audrey standing outside Audrey looking at her with newborn eyes.

From her very beginnings she saw Audrey, and was aware of all her secrets. Every little incident in her little life passed before her, and the greatest seemed infinitely small, the least of infinite significance.

The bird sang. The silence seemed to sing in unison. The crystal clarity of her vision grew. There was no darkness anywhere. Spirit, soul, and body were at last alive together in Audrey, and she knew the whole of pain.

It was neither Larry, nor Larry's child, who concerned her now: it was herself—and every other man and every other woman whom she had dishonoured in the dishonour of herself. Her poor little dishonour, hitherto a sort of sorry joke in her light mind, she suddenly found to be illimitable and to have dishonoured the world she loved so well.

If there was one thing in life she hated it was to hurt any helpless thing, and every helpless creature who had ever lived had, it seemed, been hurt by her.

Nothing ever happened to Audrey in gentle measure; she leapt to every experience of joy and pain. Whatever draught she drank she drank to the dregs.

She suffered now the agony of an old soul, this thing of thistledown, whose soul was in the making, alone in the church where she had never said a prayer!

"Can one do nothing for oneself, then: must it be always for everybody?" she cried out at last.

"I can't bear it!" she moaned; "it's too big for me! Oh, Larry! Larry! Larry!"

She crouched down, cowering in the unutterable solitude of the forsaken soul. To be alone, alone, alone in a wonderful, warm world and all from one's own folly. It was being cast forth from the throbbing heart of things that broke Audrey. She could not stand apart; she must always be drawing in closer to the "watch-fires of the tribe," to babble with them in their "wantonness, their hopes and their joys!"

The woman who could not bear to be shut out of the heart of a boy, to be shut out of the heart of the world! Something in her wild brain snapped; she could think no longer; she threw up the sponge, and put the whole matter into Larry's hands.

It was, as a matter of fact Larry's last letter that restored her balance in the end, and the Audrey she had suddenly, for one instant, seen.

When the power of thought came back, she found that her eyes had curiously widened, and altered in their focus,

and that the clearest part of the whole vision, which in the first shock had been a nightmare, was a glimpse she had caught at the back of all the horror, of the Audrey whom Larry saw and believed in, who was in the end—herself !

" It's me ! " she said, standing up at last. " Larry saw it, and I saw it, and if I don't believe in it I'll die ; and I can't die now," she entreated, " not now, with so much to do."

But there were things still to happen she had not yet reckoned with, and now they came trooping in. What Audrey did she must always do quickly, and her descent into hell, as beseemed her temperament, came now with a rush. Nothing was spared her—nothing ; but still she saw through all the chaos and the consternation. She saw, high, high above her, the Audrey of Larry's letter in a circle of light, and she fought her way back to it like a young tiger. For having seen the best at last, she must now attain to it.

There was nothing meek or even respectable in the coming back from hell of Mrs. Antrobus. She fought with the flames for her birthright of purity, with the same verve and vigour with which she had once cast it into them. She fought as she loved, with superb audacity.

The first bell for the evening service recalled her from her own affairs. She put her hat straight, and stood up. She wondered why she tottered, and felt too tired to move. She pulled herself together, and by some impulse walked straight into the shaft of light now filling the church, and falling, a sheet of silver, across the Christ.

" I know what I've done," she said, looking nervously, shyly, like a child, up in His face. " I know better than anyone else ever did, I think," she said, stuttering for the first time in her life ; " but I know—I know, also, I think, what I can do, and I'm going to do it. I'm not beaten," she said, " I'm not really beaten ! "

She lifted her hand as though to grasp something. " And I think," she said, blushing as red as Andrew, " I

think I know why you're hanging there, better than if I'd been good.

"It hurts so horribly to have hurt things that it shows one things."

Mr. Bevan caught sight of her as, following still the shaft of light, she went out by the western door, and paused, startled. She was more steeped in worldliness than any young woman he had ever met, and that very morning had hidden behind the yew hedge when his wife called. Gertrude had seen her. But still, she had sought the church in her bereavement. He thought of her as he prayed for those in trouble, and could have done it with greater fervour but for her incomprehensible avoidance, so very lately, too, of the incomparable Gertrude.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE demand Audrey had put upon her husband would have been a big one for any man, but for Andrew it was colossal, an ordeal from which his whole being revolted. To him it was like the betrayal of an inviolable secret, an intolerable affront to Audrey herself, and yet she had asked him! And—there was reason in the demand, and justice, and a wild nobility. It was part of Audrey herself. And that such a woman could have sinned! No matter to what heights or depths his love for Audrey bore him, it centred at last always in this amazed question, so intricately was the sense of sin woven in and out of Andrew.

He had mercy in fullest measure in a universal sort of way. Never in all his kind and stainless life had he condemned man or woman, and no man living could, of course, condemn Audrey!

But that it should be Audrey who had sinned!

Women would be worse, perhaps, had the wonder of Andrew in this matter been less, and yet who shall say that this is not hard on women!

His emotions in the affair did not, however, affect his tribute to Larry Carfax that night at dinner, except favourably.

Audrey might well be proud of her two men!

In certain matters Mrs. Antrobus had no scruples. She was listening to Andrew all the time from a little powdering-room behind the dining-room. Not that she doubted Andrew. She was only anxious to admire and be grateful, and be more or less an active presence in any big

happening in which he figured. Even her tiptoe entrance into her hiding-place came into Audrey's scheme of restitution.

Later on Andrew felt a mounting abashment at the intimate knowledge of the unspeakable affair betrayed in her thanks.

"But——" he stammered.

"Oh! Andrew, do you think I could possibly have sat still in my room with this going on? I was just at your back in the little room, and heard every word. Now you're shocked! But, goodness gracious! how could I have done anything else? It was a great and generous thing to do. I had to be there. You did it splendidly, and, oh, Andrew, I do thank you. It's Larry's best epitaph, and you spoke it.—And there you are still being shocked. You look shrunk up. You'd give your life for me, Andrew," she said, after a pause; "and yet you never look at me but you wonder how I could ever have done what I've done. I revolve in your mind on a pivot of sin. Are all good men like that? Would it be any comfort to you to know," she said softly, "that I do know what I've done. I know now! I found out to-day! And no pain is in the least like it," she said slowly. "No man could suffer for me as I must suffer for myself, now—and you least of all. It's such woman's pain—and yet it is everybody's."

Her eyes were dark and far away, her breath came slowly. "Yours is only your own pain, and the other men's who belong to your type. It's a rare and fine and sound type, Andrew; I admire it as I do the North Star, but I know more about pain now than any of you. I learnt in an hour more about it, and about sin, than any of you could learn in your whole long lives. So, Andrew, set your mind at rest, and do leave me to deal with the awful thing, and just go on."

"Child! don't say any more!"

"There's not much more to say, poor Andrew! But I want you to know that I'm going on, too, in spite of every-

thing, in my own way. And you must go on without me; will you, Andrew, please say you will?"

He paused. Then said gravely, "Yes, Audrey, I will go on. But—but is this the parting of our ways?"

"We can't travel together as we are," she said in a low, tired voice; "but sometimes roads meet. I'll always be about, Andrew, when you want me. I'll do all I promised for you; but please go on now without me, and without understanding me. Andrew, you were an angel while the child lived! I wish you'd be a man now, and be rather glad it came. I don't think anything else but baby could ever have made me see myself for what I am—a person who's outraged herself, and the whole, whole world. It's an awful feeling, simply. I wish I could go to sleep, and sleep for years, and wake up—the real, proper me! Oh, Andrew! I saw her—I did see her, and you have no idea——" She broke off, quivering. Then, in an instant she was as still as the child, and strangely like him. His face floated back vaguely into Andrew's stunned mind. As he stood rigid and helpless before Audrey, the look of serene and lovely expectation on the child's quiet face seemed to shine also upon hers, white and worn, etched out against the purple fold of a curtain.

She was a child, too, waiting for a new world. As Andrew, with reverent eyes and a breaking heart, looked at his wife wonderingly, he renewed and confirmed his resolution. He would do as she wished; he would go on, and for the moment without her. It seemed to be the only thing he could do for her, walk forward on a cold and lonely road, and trust her to her own keeping.

* * * * * * *

Her sin wrapped in her sorrow lay in his heart, chastening desire, and with the best that was awake in him he loved her infinitely.

Audrey was always a woman first, and the rest afterwards. When first the fact of Andrew's magnificent march forward broke upon her astonished vision, it pierced her

wayward soul in the oddest way. The infinite loneliness of life chilled her eager blood. The dividing sword of sin seemed to be plunged afresh into her heart. She was forsaken, defenceless, afraid!

"If Andrew had even a glimmer of imagination," she said, shaking and sobbing, "he'd see—he'd know! To leave me now—now—now!"

All at once a laugh broke, half strangled, through her sobs.

"And when I begged him, when I simply pushed him on—out of my way—off on his own track—— But if one could only be anything else but a woman, even for half an hour, it would be an immense relief," said Audrey.

And so this was the way of their going.

Andrew, with the sense of sin embalmed in his heart, a nameless burthen borne with heroic fortitude, went on his way. Audrey stumbled on painfully, and in her heart was the passion for perfection.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AS she made for life, the loneliness of her mortality was often too much for Audrey. Impermanence took and made of her its puppet. Fears she had long forgotten came trooping in. The better counsels of Larry were obliterated; she remembered only Larry himself, a creature no better than herself and far more dear.

The old disreputable desire to hurt and slay and destroy that had rocked through her before she threw over Larry, came in force on every flank. Mocking spirits of evil rollicked at will in her wild brain. Even the boys were no longer safe in her hot hands. They were the only undefiled treasures she had ever possessed, so in her instinctive fear for them she flew to London, and did an incredible amount of mischief until the intolerable pain in her mood drove her back to the Vision—waiting always behind the cloud of smoke, which once seen can never be forgotten.

It was at this period that Mrs. Antrobus won the reputation from which she still suffers, and awoke in men's minds an abiding wonder as to how she kept her weapons so miraculously keen in the rust-producing, mould-inducing air of a scholastic environment in Surrey. She was the scandal and the envy of many an old hand.

By a fortunate or unfortunate chance, Mr. Norman became aware of the radiant coruscations of this presumably untamable star, and he laughed without putting on the breastplate of Mary, which shows that his love for Mary was now as unconditioned as his trust in Mrs. Antrobus.

In a dumb, vague way Andrew knew a great deal, but what he knew best was that Audrey was too fearless either to lie to him, or to be a traitor in his camp. So her sin sank deeper into his heart, and her sorrow grew more sorrowful. This was cold comfort, so he worked harder than ever, and *his* reputation also grew in bounds.

His venture in cramming in the biggest slump yet known in the cramming industry was a trumphant success. An invention had brought him in a large sum. His standing in the scientific world was assured.

It was Audrey who really suffered for her sins as suffering counts, for it was she who had alone beheld perfection, and seen the vision which does not fade. It was she who must for ever return to it, and always at the point of the sword. So when tired of darkness, she craved for the light, and she would not be denied until the veil was lifted again and the light shone through. Nothing deterred her or held her back. When very desperate she did not trouble even about her sins. She thought only of her aching need, she contended as one with authority, and pressed past the sins. She demanded, and cried for that which was her own.

It was no importunate widow who fought in Audrey. It was a soldier with victory in his heart. She fell and rose. She fell and again she rose. Her will was indomitable, her desire unquenchable. The agony of a lonely heart is impossible to one born for love, and to the brave come all things.

* * * * * * *

One day, selfless and purified, Audrey lay sobbing at the feet of God. When the wild little driver gave up the reins at last to the Hand behind her own, and so found freedom, her first impulse was to tell Adeline everything. It seemed so urgent, so imperative, the one and only thing that she could do. For now she was suddenly aware that it was this for which Adeline was still waiting,

and that now the last strain would slip from the poor tired heart.

She told her everything. Audrey was always complete in her methods. The unfortunate spinster was fairly dissolved in blushes before she had half finished. Things known in the white silence of the spirit are quite another story when poured out through the red mouth of the flesh. Adeline, if triumphant, was shattered. It took all Audrey's wits to restore her.

"It's so weak of me," faltered Adeline. "When I knew it all in my heart all the time!"

"I know," said Audrey ruefully. "It's me telling it. But oh, Adeline! don't be blushing again! It's like a stab. It's awful simply. And it's all very well—you'd never care for me like this, if I'd been a born saint. Don't argue, you couldn't. I wish Andrew was more like you," she said with the saddest eyes.

"I can die now," said Adeline, with a sigh of dreamy content, and rather sentimentally.

Audrey was robust in the twinkling of an eye.

"Oh, Adeline, you mustn't yet. I'm so lonely. I have nothing altogether my own except you. Don't die yet—for goodness' sake, don't," she said, shuddering. "A little more pain can't matter now, when it's so nearly done with. Adeline, dear darling," she wheedled, "don't leave me yet."

CHAPTER XXXV

THERE came times when the very heat and turmoil of the fight were a grim joy to Audrey. She was puffed up, and went like a white flame through the boys. These were memorable periods. The old Audrey was as sparks in the flame, and the establishment not only rejoiced, but did its work unusually well.

Andrew would have rejoiced also had his courage been greater, but, on the whole, he bore up bravely, and the days went on, and the hunger of loneliness was now always in Audrey's heart. She had at last been unselfish enough to let Adeline go home, and strong enough to refuse her last request.

"Let me tell Andrew that I know everything, Audrey, and that my last wish is that you should be the mother of his children," said Adeline on the morning of her last day.

"No," said Audrey at last. "That lies between Andrew and me. How did you know this, Adeline?"

"I know everything now, I think, dear. Call one child Adeline, Audrey, and make her all that I might have been if you'd come sooner."

Andrew's march forward was growing quite triumphant His step was lighter. His eyes looked boldly out into the future, already in his grasp, and manifest in all his bearing. A fine fortitude was stamped on his brow indeed, an unassuageable sorrow in his heart, but standing firm upon what had been he was ready now for all that might come.

His face was young, with the ineffaceable youth of those who dwell amongst great and permanent things, and little white hairs crept quietly out among his brown ones.

"That's my sin," said Audrey, each time she saw a new one, "and he's forgetting to be a man, and nothing in the whole world will ever make me forget to be a woman, and what shall I do?—what on earth shall I do?"

She fled as usual to the boys, and for sure consolation what can beat them? But the mother-hunger in a woman's own heart what can satisfy? Hardly even the boys of some other woman.

"If only one were a nice well-bred cow," said Audrey, "with definite duties and moderate ambitions, or a clergyman's daughter dyed in the wool. It's being a fully alive woman all the time that upsets the apple-cart, I think.

"It's beautiful to look at Andrew doing just as I told him," she sighed, "and leaving me here in the lurch alone; and it's all Katharine's fault, training him into always doing what he's been told to do. Women are at the root of all evil."

Mr. Norman was also struck by the solitary advance of Mr. Antrobus.

"Mrs. Antrobus is a forceful engine of destruction," he reflected, "when once she gets the steam up. It doesn't take much to break up a man—we're frail creatures—but it takes a lot to harden him into a new mould. Antrobus might be a great man, but he'll probably end in only being a great scientist, and it's the devil of a shame."

One day spring drew Audrey into the heart of the wood, and in the busy coming of the myriad life about her she forgot her loneliness. She quickened in the quickening life in leaf and bud and bough, and in that quivering in all the little people in earth and sky and air. Young life rollicked in her young blood. She opened her arms wide and gathered in the world. She opened her mouth wide and asked God to fill it.

A wonderful expectation awoke in Audrey. An ineffable harmony composed her mind. She was one with the melody of the world, a citizen of the dear City of God. Her place in it and her rights in it were sure. The quickening of joy was in the heart that had known the whole of

sorrow. Her forfeited birthright, purified by fire, lay even now in her clean hands. The past and the present and the future were all hers, and God's hand was still upon the wheel of time. She lay back against the mossy trunk, rocked, as it were, in strong, protecting arms, and suddenly with no volition of her own, her hushed senses sprang to throbbing life.

She, too, was part of the youth of the warm world, and the chiefest of her rights in it was hope. The abundance of the teeming earth could alone satisfy this hungry heart. The spirit and the power to express and to bring forth life; the spirit and the passion of motherhood rocked through the wood, claiming, demanding, compelling, running like red wine through all her veins.

And presently the sun went down behind the trees, the passion went west with his master. The sense of mortality in all things was paramount. The scent of death contended coldly with the fragrance of life. The order of the world was dislocated—chaos afoot.

And oh! the piteous shock of it! The cruel awakening!

Audrey forgot that she had ever been a woman in whom experience had burnt up tears. She lay with her head against a mossy bank, and forgetting pride and knowledge, dropped down into the icy stream which flows for ever around the warm zone of hope, and cried like a child. She had fought a lone hand so long, so long. She was very tired. She had done what she could, and she was still an outcast.

Andrew did not even know the sylvan haunts of his wife; he was too fully occupied with the higher part of her, and her inconceivable fall from grace. He did not use this term. It was far too definite for his sense of courtesy and high sensitiveness to appearances. He wrapped the whole unutterable tragedy up in a gentle veil of mist, more impenetrable than bulwarks of steel, and carefully embalmed it in the depths of his being. He knew less than nothing of the flesh of Audrey, and so could hardly be expected to know very much about her spirit; but he

loved her with the best part of him, and was doing his utmost to obey her command, and often wondered dumbly at the radiant gaiety of her face and her frocks as she went in and out of his daily life. He would have suffered less could she, even for three months, have worn mourning for her dead.

If he could have stooped to jealousy he would frequently have speculated upon the mysteries of love and Larry; but Andrew meant to be a great man, so he took care to set his house in order.

Never in all his life did he experience a greater shock than now at the sight of Audrey sobbing in the damp moss. She looked less than eighteen. Her hat was awry. She looked anything but tidy. She was ridiculously young, but with a youth which in no sort of way repulsed him.

Her defenceless dishevelment made her almost easy to Andrew. He caught her in the firm grasp of a father and set her upright.

"Audrey!" So fatherly did he feel, that there was a tone of mild disapproval in his voice. The sense of responsibility in him seemed to be swelling. There was a smudge of green slime, presumably from the moss, on her light skirt.

This was as fundamentally unlike Audrey as her red eyes and her swollen cheeks. If only she had been more often like this. His heart bounded and stood still. He deeply sighed.

"Audrey! Aren't you well?"

She was becoming more like herself—he almost wished she wasn't. He had high hopes. Perhaps—perhaps—at last the sense of sin, that might have made them one—— He tore his mind from the wild dream.

She, too, saw the smudge of green, and was—she was making it worse with her handkerchief. "Audrey!" he gasped. His fatherliness weakened. He had neither word nor action for dilemmas of this order. Andrew's education, as we well know, had hardly begun.

"I'm quite well," she said; "but sometimes even the wisest are fools." There was a snap in her uplifted eyes for all their redness; anything but meekness in her silver voice.

He paused to think it all out. His wild hope dropped wingless. And suddenly Audrey's primitive anger against Andrew which she had been at such pains to keep down all these desolating years of increasing consciousness and lonely pain, rushed up from some submerged abyss, and she had never been at a loss for words in which to express her emotions.

"You look as if you were seeing a ghost all the time, Andrew, she cried at last. I'm not a ghost. You may be, but I'm alive. I'm as much alive—as—as the spring. If you were alive, perhaps you'd understand," she said, taking three pins out of her rickety hat.

Andrew was alive enough to notice that her hands were shaking.

They were steady, he remembered, that night when she told him the news which had changed life.

"I'm worse than being ill," she proceeded. Her hands were now shaking in her lap; she made no pretence even of arranging her hair. "I'm being defeated. I'm being defeated now in a final sort of way. The others were skirmishes; this is uncommonly like Armageddon," she said slowly; "and I, of all people, and to be defeated in the midst of victorious things! I loathe and hate and abhor it!"

"But, child, how?"

"How! Oh, Andrew! How! Because I'm standing still before your judgment-seat, after all these years, being condemned—condemned—condemned all day long."

Andrew felt as though he were in the first plunge of an icy bath. After all his high hopes—this!

"And now," said Audrey, "I'm being misjudged, not judged at all, because I've won. Oh, Andrew! I have. I've won; I've got myself back. My own real self; you've never once seen it, Andrew, and it's been very hard and

very lonely doing it all alone—In a way, it's not being alone really," she said, curiously flushing, "but it's been rather dreadful since Adeline died. She was the most enormous help. Adeline was a saint, and she knew, and she trusted me down to the ground, Andrew. She saw farther than you, Andrew, because she loved more, and so she trusted me without understanding. Larry was anything but a saint, and he understood me perfectly well, and, he, too, trusted me down to the ground. Just before he died and knew it—when no man could tell a lie; besides, Larry never told lies—he said that he knew I was good—good—just good! You are the only part of the world that matters who now mistrusts me, and till I conquer you I shall feel defeated, and—I wonder if you're unconquerable, Andrew? Adeline, Larry and you! They represent the world to me more personally and nearly and significantly than if my story was being yelled out this minute in all the evening papers."

At last he could speak blankly, amazedly.

"Audrey! I trust you entirely."

"Trust me entirely! You don't trust me at all. The one thing you withhold shows exactly where your trust begins and ends. It is the test of the very large part of the world a man like you represents. I am a prisoner at the bar being misjudged as righteously after I've won—myself!—as before I knew there was a self to win. Andrew, if you could only see it—the new me!" she cried. "Oh! it's far enough away, sometimes one can only just keep on believing in it, and that's hard—it's the hardest thing in the world—but once you've seen it—you—you know you've got the right to—everything. It's because the real you isn't you at all perhaps, it's part of everything. What's done is done. You can't forget your sin or remove it or cover it up. You can only use it as bricks and mortar to build up again with. And that you should still think that I couldn't build up children. Not now, after everything."

She was looking up to something Andrew had not yet

seen, and she laughed softly out into the twilight in her old way, and in some new and ineffable way that thrilled the deeply-moved and perplexed man.

"I will trust you to the uttermost, Audrey," he said, after a long pause.

"Do you think I wanted that?" she said, jumping up with flaming eyes. "Do you think I'm trying to coerce you, or wrest anything from you? Until you can trust me as the two others did, I want nothing from you. Do you think I could be the mother of your children on suffer ance? Do you know nothing about me, after all these years—all I've made you suffer? You must first see in me, in *me—me—me*, who's lost and won myself! and suffered, and made you suffer, the best of all the mothers in all the world for your children. It must be that, Andrew, the best of all, or a tragedy for both of us. You want the fullness of life as much as I do, Andrew—more," she said, with bold serenity, "for I know what it is and you don't.

"I want nothing now," she said, swaying a little, but with a marvel of pride in her white face; "nothing, but—" she said, falling suddenly back into the old Audrey—"but someone had to turn you in the right direction, and I'd like to know who'd do it if I didn't?"

Andrew's eyes were on the ground; his face worked curiously. She was not thinking of Andrew just then.

"I could never love you as I loved Larry," she said dreamily; "that's one part of me and can never be divided. One can never make it repeat itself in the same way. But there are a thousand ways of love, and they are all wonderful. I have so much waiting for you, Andrew, for everything and everyone—for the very stocks and stones, I think, that sometimes I feel as if it would rise up in a great wave and drown me. I have enough for you, Andrew, and the whole world, but—it's held back; it's being defeated like me, until you trust me as those two did?"

Andrew had a thousand words but not one came. She sighed and sat down on a root of the old tree.

"There's so much pain," she said, "and it's not the best thing. Joy's the best; it is, it must be. We all want it so. We ache for it so bitterly. And unless we can turn all our sorrow into joy, I think we've missed the best. It's awful to miss the best—to be defeated," she said. "To be alive all over and to be defeated. Oh, Andrew! Life is so much to me, and it would be as much to you! Some day I believe I could love you so much that you could understand everything. You could live as I can live."

"I understand you, Audrey—at last I understand you—perfectly." The light on her pure face suddenly lit his, the passion in her pure heart was aflame in his.

"Our roads have met at last," he said, "and this is the dawn of the new life, and I—I have been the worst sinner of the three."

She paused and looked at him.

"No," she said, "that's my proud privilege. But, Andrew, I'm glad you said it. It's—it's made you suddenly as young as me."

They went home together, silently, as lovers may, and the song of earth and sky and air was in their hearts.

As they came up the yew walk Audrey saw Mr. Norman.

"Aren't you glad I got him for you, Andrew?" she said. "Go on, now. I've something to say to him."

"Mr. Norman," she said, "what day can Mary come? I'm quite ready for her."

Why he did it Norman never knew, but he took off his hat, laughed in her sweet face, stooped, and kissed her hand.

"You've been very long about this invitation, Mrs. Antrobus. I've been expecting it for months, and so has Mary."

THE END.

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